A SEMESTER IN “THE OTHER WASHINGTON”
WITH THE SPOKANE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

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It would be impossible to list all those who have helped me on this labyrinthian trek to a career in journalism. I'd like to thank my parents, first and foremost, who have patiently put up with my scholastic wanderings through political science, English literature and finally becoming a newsman. To all extended members of my family for numbly nodding when I drone on about politics at holidays and parties. To friends from Columbia, Nashville, Kansas City and elsewhere: thanks for your support and tacit understanding of my geekiness.

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Chapter One: An introduction to a winding journalistic road

Politics and writing were passions of mine long before I stepped foot in the Missouri School of Journalism. I came here, specifically, to learn how to write about complicated and important matters with the general public as an audience. Having a background in political science as an undergraduate both helped and hurt me as I began this quest. In early stories I wrote for the Columbia Missourian, I was interested in making broad, thematic connections and jam-packing my sentences with information. I was a thoughtful writer. I wanted to be a good writer. The two go hand-in-hand, I've learned, but in unexpected ways.

Several courses here at the Journalism School have aided me on that path. News Reporting and Advanced News Reporting, and the opportunity to work under several city editors, all of whom helped guide my reporting and writing skills, were two of the most valuable courses in the entirety of my now-lengthy academic career. Intermediate Writing forced me to think about how I was presenting the stories I was telling and challenged me to do a different type of reporting to engage audiences through the use of narrative techniques. These were the same narrative techniques I'd explored in fiction during my time as an English literature graduate student at Belmont University.

The other side of the coin is news editing, and I've had a heap of experience on that front during my brief stay at the university as well. First, writing headlines and editing stories for the print and digital products of the Columbia Missourian forced me to think about grammar and syntax. They also forced me to critique my own reporting skills.
That only intensified during the summer I spent working for the Chicago Tribune as part of the Dow Jones News Editing program. I've always been a thoughtful reader and writer. I'm now a thoughtful reporter and editor, the lines between which may be blurring thanks in part to technological evolution and certain realities of the industry. Looking back on the valuable experience I've had with editors at all the places I've gone, I hope that statement isn't true. But I'm preparing myself, anyway.

I'm never going to be a perfect writer, reporter or editor. I've made peace with that (even though I still pull my hair out over every sentence I commit to paper). I started this project with the main goal to examine the way government reporting is done on both a practical and an analytic level. I learned from myself, using the classic “Missouri Method” on the job covering politics in Washington. Through my descriptive research project, I learned from colleagues covering government at both the federal and state levels. I've spent many of my young adult years trying to figure out what my skills are and how I want them to contribute to my professional career. My time spent at the Journalism School has brought me to this point, and my capstone project in Washington exposed me to journalistic experiences I wouldn’t otherwise have had. Eventually, I hope to parlay my professional experiences into teaching and writing informed opinion columns on politics. But first, I need to pay my dues and make sure I have honed the essential writing and reporting skills needed in journalism. This project was another step in that direction.
Chapter Two: My time with *The Spokane Spokesman-Review*

I served as the independent Washington, D.C., correspondent for the Spokane *Spokesman-Review* during my time in the Journalism School's Washington Program. Independent is a bit of a misnomer. I worked closely with statehouse reporter, editor and Mizzou alum Jim Camden in generating story ideas and preparing drafts for publication. Once he'd seen my work, I shipped it to both David Wasson and Addy Hatch at the *Spokesman*'s city desk, who helped me trim for space and get at the meat of my stories for readers. The “so what” question was usually the focus of our conversations.

In my semester in “the other Washington,” as the folks in Spokane like to call it, I covered a Supreme Court hearing and the second inauguration of President Barack Obama. I also wrote about numerous legislative efforts to address constituent issues and blogged frequently about my experiences and the daily noise of federal politics. I shot photos for the newspaper and in my own time drafted a couple of audio spots for use on my blog (misplacedjayhawkreporter.wordpress.com), where I kept a record of stories I'd produced and some occasional musings on the state of affairs in the nation's capital based on my academic background. In all, it was a busy semester, though I found myself producing many more in-depth, explanatory stories than breaking news coverage. I hope to attain those skills as I continue my work with the *Spokesman* through summer 2013.

I produced weekly field notes, as per the requirements of the program, detailing work completed both in producing for the newspaper and in pursuing my research project, which follows this account. These notes are reproduced in full below.
Week One (Jan. 7 - 13, 2013)

The week started on an emotional and intellectual high for me. I'd been to the Supreme Court before. When I was 18. That was before hours of Communication and Constitutional Law. I did come in with some inexperience, however. I've never done courtroom reporting before. So I crossed that one off in the highest court in the country, which is nice. I had to rely on my hand note-taking, which is shaky at best, because of the technological limitations imposed by the court. I think I did OK. I would have liked to capture more of the atmosphere in the court for readers in Spokane, who probably won't have a chance to enter the hallowed halls during oral argument. Or, at least, they'd have to go a long way out of their way to do so. But I think I captured the spirit of the legal argument (after some coaxing from my editor, Jim Camden) and produced a story that didn't condescend to my readers, but also didn't stray in the abstract too long.

The week ended on a bit of a low. After the Supreme Court appearance, I spent most of the week trying to make contact with Congressional staffers — who were mostly out of town. I pitched a story Thursday after working on my research paper for most of the week in the National Press Building, and spent both Thursday and Friday nailing it down. It was a follow-up to a story on Wednesday in which the Air Force announced Fairchild, a base near Spokane, was a finalist to receive the first few units of a jet tanker set to be unveiled in 2017. After the initial story broke Wednesday, I worked Thursday and Friday to get a sense of what was going on at other sites selected as finalists, and tell the stories of how they ended up on the short list. It turned out being kind of a city story,
and again it was a subject I knew very little about. Again, I'm shaking off the cobwebs after a semester mostly mired in seminars and multimedia skills. So I'm moderately satisfied with my work this week.

On the research project front, I spent this week culling my samples from the newspapers I selected for study. I hit a hiccup when Newsbank, the database I was planning on using, pulled down most of its content after the library chose not to re-up on its subscription. I switched to Factiva, and had to do most of the sampling over again. I have my stories for study, and will now work on coding a sample set to be analyzed by another graduate student coder. I will recruit said coder during the next week. Once the intercoder reliability check is complete, I'll be able to get down to the nitty-gritty of analyzing my sample. I envision starting that process by the end of this month.

Week Two (Jan. 14 - 20, 2013)

Week two started with decidedly less intensity than week one. Even though the House was in session starting Monday, my week didn't really start to pick up until Wednesday, when I was charged with getting reaction from the Washington/Idaho delegation on President Barack Obama's moves on gun control. The exercise proved decidedly uninteresting, though. With Republican lawmakers on a retreat and senators still back home in the Inland Northwest, it became a routine exercise of reading through official statements and looking at voting records. I produced a pedestrian story that was supplemental to another package with more substantive quotes from local groups back in
Washington state. But I got practice working with press folk for the elected officials, so I'll chalk it up as a win.

A story on the new KC-46A tankers I wrote and finished Monday ended up publishing Friday, and rubbed one Senate staffer the wrong way. Apparently I hadn't mentioned her boss prominently enough in the article, and I got an agitated phone call as I was interviewing high school band students during a lunch in downtown D.C. I handled it with a reasonable level of decorum and discussed the encounter with my editor after defusing the situation. I suppose I need to learn the politics of covering politicians, and this experience brought that home first-hand.

On the research front, I spent the week formulating my codebook and reaching out to the editors at the publications I've zeroed in on for research. I've made contact with folks at the Kennebec Journal and Madison Capital Times. I'm still working on speaking with someone for the Denver Post. I'll be recruiting another graduate student this week to analyze ten articles from the Salt Lake Tribune, the publication I've had to use for intercoder reliability because the St. Paul Pioneer Press isn't included in our Factiva database subscription at the university. I'll spend this week recruiting that graduate student and beginning the intercoder sample coding, and follow through on interviews with editors at my newspapers.
Week Three (Jan. 21 – 27, 2013)

After two weeks of a pretty straightforward routine, the third week tossed several curveballs my way. I was back to doing event coverage in my reporting on the inauguration, tagging along on high school field trips and weaving through the massive crowds in downtown D.C. to capture color for a story that eventually made it to the front page of the Spokesman last Tuesday. I’ve covered events and written narratively about them before, but I have yet to do anything that was like pounding the pavement in D.C. along with a million other people. In retrospect, I would have planned my route better and probably left the swearing-in early enough to be on Pennsylvania for the parade. But the story I wrote achieved the goals my editors and I set out for it, so I won't second-guess myself too much.

The seminars were the highlight of the week. I especially appreciated the insight of Jeff Biggs, who provided a very cogent and straightforward discussion of some of the issues that will ripple through Washington over the next few months. It was also refreshing to hear Katy Steinmetz speak of her experiences trying to get through the flacks and press releases to stories buried in the constantly bustling district. I'm sure I'll save her pointers on office politics for when I do find myself as a member of a team, rather than spearheading coverage for an outlet. And, of course, winding through the exhibits at the Newseum was an experience that will stick with me for a while. The mangled antenna tower grabbed my attention on the way up that giant pivot elevator and didn't let go for the entire afternoon.
On the research front, I've gathered the responses on statehouse reporting resources from the Madison Capital Times and Kennebec Journal. This week will be spent finishing the coding of my reliability sample and trying to track down an editor from the Denver Post to comment on the way they cover both levels of government. I have recruited a graduate student (Casey Morell) who will also be coding this week. I plan to have that portion of the project completely finished by the middle of February, test for reliability, and begin my coding in earnest shortly thereafter. That would give me about a month to finish all the coding, run the analysis and write up the results and discussion portion of my paper. I've set a tentative due date for myself of March 20 for a first draft of my research report, and will keep you all posted as to any necessary revisions as I move forward.

_Week Four (Jan. 28 – Feb. 3, 2013)_

I spent the fourth week on the job mostly mired in tax code — which, of course, is a task I'm used to, having done the explanatory piece on tax increment financing in Columbia last semester. It involved reading statutes, talking to policy wonks and crunching numbers from the Washington Department of Revenue. Those were all things I felt comfortable with. It was the waiting outside the Senate chamber, trying to grab a few moments with a U.S. Senator, that was new to me. I described the experience, in a blog post, as a combination of democracy, the DMV and the red carpet. Sens. Al Franken, John McCain and John Kerry — people I've seen on TV and in AP photos — bumping against me as I'm trying to grab a quote actually affected me for the first time while
reporting. I pride myself on keeping an even keel when I'm in journalist mode.

Wednesday, before the Kerry confirmation vote, was the only time I can remember
breaking that character, so to speak, in my short time as a working journalist.

I enjoyed Friday's seminars immensely. John LaBombard provided an eye-
opening glimpse through the perspective of the folks I'm currently working for stories. It
was refreshing, though frightening, to hear media folks may be purposefully ducking me
in my pursuit of a story. I described the explanation of how news is meted out through
communication directors, press secretaries and reporters as “icky” in the seminar, and I'm
not sure LaBombard broke my opinion on that completely. After interviewing Sen. Maria
Cantwell with her legislative director and press secretary present at the Capitol on
Thursday, the director told me he appreciated that there was no “gotcha” in my
questioning. Which really wasn't the point in an explanatory piece, but I felt the same
way I felt when my TIF story received a seal of approval from Mike Matthes last spring.
I'm glad I got it right, and I'm happy my work is explaining things in a way that those
involved in day-to-day work on a subject agree with. At the same time, I'm thinking more
about my readers when I'm writing as opposed to the sources who gave me the
information. Their approval of what I write is secondary on my mind, but here in
Washington, they may be the ones feeding me a lot of stories.

Mark Hamrick said this week, as we were both headed out of the office late
Wednesday, that it's difficult to do original stories with impact in this town. I'm learning
the process, and while I see how the process ultimately serves the greater explanatory
good, I doubt I'll ever shake my discomfort with the cozy relationship between the
Washington press and those insulating elected officials from us.

I'll wrap this up with a quick note on research, because I've already droned on too long. I'm finishing up my intercoder sample coding this weekend before the Big Game, as I'm contractually obligated to call it, and will hopefully be conducting the statistical analysis soon through the VPN client and SPSS. I'm also working on finishing up my collection of resource data from my selected newspapers. Still working on getting a few minutes to chat with someone in the Denver Post shop.

Week Five (Feb. 4 – 10, 2013)

Week five on the job was all about writing for me. I began Monday with a draft and edits to make on the sales tax story I'm working on, which has become something of an obsession. I spent Monday pondering what direction the story should take and, after composing a budget story for the daily paper, talked to Jim about it. He'd asked me to do a little more reporting to get the story where it needed to be. He advised me one of the major mistakes young reporters make is to redo things without the knowledge needed to do them correctly, ultimately rewriting things several times. I realized how true that has been in my early days of journalism. I resolved to wait until I'd spoken with who I needed to in order to piece the story together, which I finally did Wednesday. I spent Thursday composing at the capitol, and this weekend I've been reading some of Erik Larson's terrific narrative non-fiction writing. His prose dazzles my mind and continues to give me a benchmark to shoot for in composing my stories to attract casual audiences.
The seminars were once again fascinating this week. I was especially enamored with Alan Ehrenhalt's discussion of state government reporting, since that's what my research pertains to and what I'd ultimately like to end up doing for awhile. His advice, after I asked him a question about the ability at the state level to cover the issues rather than the “race,” to simply cover the people was eye-opening. It makes perfect sense. Covering the federal government has proven interesting and challenging, but I'm not sure it's what I want to do when I move on. I think, at the state- and community-level, the amount of access we have enables us to do those people stories that burrow beneath the issues, and I thank Mr. Ehrenhalt for illuminating that fact.

Research-wise, I finally finished the intercoder reliability work this weekend. The method is looking good. I've achieved the threshold of agreement (85%) I was shooting for, and will now commence coding my samples for analysis. I've also received word back from the Capital Times and Kennebec Journal about state reporting resources. They've remained fairly stable since the 2008 election cycle, though they've been dropping over the past several decades. I assume the same is true of the Denver Post, but I'm working on assuring that fact with their management. I will pursue that angle this week and begin coding my articles. Let me know if there are any questions.

*Week Six (Feb. 11 – 17, 2013)*

State of the Union coverage was the highlight of week 6. I got the call Monday afternoon that I would be expected to gather color from the entirety of the Inland Northwest delegation, which includes four senators and two representatives. I
successfully interviewed five of them in the jumble that occurred after the speech. The exterior of the Senate/elevator crowd swelled substantially in Statuary Hall, where I was elbowing other reporters to ask Raul Labrador and Cathy McMorris Rodgers questions. Luckily, the senators got out of there quickly and I was able to interview them on the phone, then put together a 400-word story in less than a half hour. It's the first time I've felt the crunch since I've been here.

I'm a little bit disappointed in myself and the amount of time I'm spending on hunting stories and nailing down sources. Jim described the process to me as trying to get a glass of water from a fire hose. Some days you get a drop. Some days you get a full glass. And some days you get the skin scorched off your face. Most of this week has felt face melting. I'm finished with my sales tax story and just waiting for art to catch up so the story can publish. I'm also working on a story that will require tough questions of McMorris Rodgers. Hopefully I'll have a chance to speak with her during the recess to put the story together. But next week could be a tough week story-wise, with everyone out of town. I'm going to suggest catching up on a few stories that have slipped under my radar over the past couple weeks while working on other projects.

A quick word on the speakers this week — I found both seminars extremely eye-opening. Mike McCurry had a description of press secretary that I found incredibly different than my experience with legislative press secretaries, who seem to be very much attached at the hip to their employers. McCurry described the White House secretary as someone much more as a clinger-on, trying to actively work with the corps to get the
answers out there. I found Tom Korologos' discussion of lobbying to be overly optimistic, and I wish that he'd talked a little more about the implications of all those discussions going on in the back room. As a journalist, I prefer transparency, and while I've had good experiences chatting with lobbyists on background so far, part of me still bristles at the way influence is thrown around in Washington. Perhaps I'm under the spell of the narrative by politicians — those who decry lobbyists and require them to interact with their constituencies.

I'm in the midst of coding articles for analysis. That may be my big project next week, in between waiting for interviews. I'm still on track to finish up my analysis by the middle of March and have a draft together by the end of that month.

*Week Seven (Feb. 18 – 24, 2013)*

I spent my recess week (week seven, for those counting) ensconced at the Press Club building, for the most part, putting in feverish calls to agencies across the continent asking them had they prepared for the sequester and how much sky-falling would occur next Friday? It took me to lands of “off the record” and “on background,” forwarding of internal memos and a bunch of people who really didn't want to talk. In the middle of this, I was constantly asking myself two questions. One, why does this matter? I mean, are we as journalists in Washington pushing something that probably won't affect the average person? Maybe. It was just as tough for me to answer that question, even with all the information and free time I have to pore over government documents and predictions, than the people I was calling. And two, would printing a story simply add to the white
noise (that's what I'm going to call it, after reading three days of finger-pointing columns by Bob Woodward and counter-statements from the White House and House GOP members)?

I ultimately published a piece in Saturday's Spokesman that pinpointing a few local agencies that might be receiving cuts (http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/feb/23/region-plans-for-sequester/). It garnered 51 online comments, the most of which were sniping rebuttals between obviously partisan readers. I'm proud of the work I did, and how I drilled down through the boisterous talk near Capitol Hill, but I'm left here on Sunday morning with something of an empty feeling in my stomach. Did I contribute to the discussion? Are people better informed thanks to my work? Or am I adding to the cynicism that I see seeping from readers of this story near and far? I'm working on a more policy-driven piece. When that publishes, I will share some of my insights on that process. I've learned a ton in two weeks, I will say that.

I've had the good fortune of chatting frequently with Mark Hamrick while he's been sharing the suite out of which I work most days. I was hoping to have a chance to talk to him in the group about blogging, because I think (reading his stuff on a daily basis) that's the type of writing I'd like to do some day, tongue-in-cheek but in-depth looks at broader policy questions that leave the reader with questions to answer themselves. Mark is very good at it, from what I've read, and his online presence is an example I'm trying to emulate as I look for a job. I certainly appreciated the captivating stories from USA Today disaster reporter Donna Leinwand, but my emotional attachment
to subjects and queasy stomach will likely keep me from ever being able to do what she does. I listened to her presentation with awe and respect, and took her advice in narrative writing to get all the details one can from limited interviews before setting down to write to heart. But I just don't see myself following her footsteps.

On the research front, I have completed 1/3 of my analysis of articles, thanks to a slow President's Day. I hope to complete my analysis in the next two weeks and begin statistical work by the beginning of March. It should not be difficult, after that, to churn out a draft by the end of the month so that revisions will be possible before I need to schedule a defense. Of course, call me/email me with questions.

*Week Eight (Feb. 25 – March 3, 2013)*

While my eighth week on the job started off slow, and I was starting to doubt I'd ever get anywhere with a story I've been working on for several weeks involving a piece of legislation from a key member of our congressional delegation, it turned out to be one of the more rewarding and productive weeks I've had in Washington so far. I wrote a story outlining some of our more right-leaning delegates' take on the sequester and budget crisis, thanks to a press sit-down where I actually built up the nerve to ask a question. I wrote a Violence Against Women Act local reaction piece that took top-billing from The AP story we originally ran in the paper. I worked with Jim to piece together my legislative piece, after working through some difficulty I had with the congresswoman's office in getting the article together. Finally, on Thursday, I was offered a summer job on the Spokesman's city desk, which earned a pat on the back from
all the editors I've worked with in Spokane thus far. I've also got a couple things on the hopper for early next week, so I'm feeling in a good place on the professional side after a couple of weeks of toiling with little to show for it (in my opinion).

I found our Friday discussions engaging as usual. I've tried to tune out some of the Bob Woodward stuff, because I tended to agree with my peers in saying that I think the seasoned journalist overplayed his hand a bit in the email exchange and I'm also beyond the point of cynical about the finger-pointing that's been going on surrounding the sequester. I appreciated the conservative angle offered by one of the readings Barbara sent us to peruse before class, that the liberal media seems to be flying to the White House's side on the issue, but I also think Woodward's engaging in a little saber-rattling of his own with his own skin in the game, so to speak. Our guest Friday, the opinion writer Jonathan Capehart of the Washington Post, described it as a story that is too inwardly focused on Washington and its own importance. And I think that captured the essence of my whole malaise with the federal spending issue. I'm writing here in the district for an audience literally thousands of miles away. What's a big deal here may be a big deal there, but this bout of whose to blame make for a fun political story, but not for someone trying to understand how the appropriations process works and why the ongoing uncertainty is leaving them in the lurch. I hope, before I get out of here, to actually write a budget story (since we have Patty Murray chairing the committee) that explains the process, and its current deplorable state, in an engaging and informative way. I'll need a few more bouts of inspiration to do that, though.
I've worked my way through analysis of the Madison Capital Times. I have just the Denver Post left to do, then it's time for statistical analysis and writing up the results. I'll be looking to schedule my oral defense soon, as well.

*Week Nine (March 4 – 10, 2013)*

The walk-and-talk was a focus for me in week nine. I've never been very good at it. On my best days, one task is all that my too-male head can handle. However, I've found in my few months here that it's the best way to interview a legislator and get an off-the-cuff response. After a few quiet days spent prepping for the Larry Craig hearing that didn't materialize thanks to the horrific snowstorm that hit the town Wednesday, I spent Thursday in a flurry of reporting, attending a nomination hearing for Interior Secretary pick Sally Jewell (she's from Seattle) and trying to track down a Medicare reform story that may have rich narrative possibilities. In the midst of this, I'm trying to interview our junior senator, Maria Cantwell, because I was informed by an editor that whenever you are offered an opportunity to talk to a senator, you take it.

So I'm juggling a recorder, a pen and pad, and my coat through the halls of the Dirksen Senate Building, riding elevators with other elected officials, noting their demeanor and understanding I'll never be able to write about this moment because it simply doesn't matter, issues-wise, to our readership. But it was the morning after the Rand Paul filibuster, and Cantwell was getting some joshing from Republican senators from Wyoming and South Dakota on the issue.
It was a reminder that these are people I'm covering. You go to a committee hearing and get a stolid statement about some particular appropriations issue. Then you engage in conversation or try to get access some other way, and find out there's a layer to these people that it's almost impossible to convey in the column space you're afforded for daily journalism. Where do you fit it in? Especially when your job is to get down what's absolutely necessary?

In the end, my writing about the meeting made it into the paper. Any comments I got from the walk-and-talk, which I'm still not great at, were edited out. And it was fair, because it was the weakest part of the story. I'm still not great at writing, talking and conveying the information in a cogent form. I'm learning. But it also got me thinking about ways to portray the human side of these folks, and not just when we write a semi-annual feature story on their re-election bid. But how we portray their day-to-day personalities and the impact those have on lawmaking.

On the research front, I took the weekend off up in Philadelphia to see a pal of mine and thus didn't get as much coding done as I would have liked. I still need to finish the Denver Post work. I'm going to work double-time this week and hope to have everything coded and into SPSS by next weekend. That would still give me a ballpark of having a draft of my research together by the end of the month for revision. I will keep you posted.
Week Ten (March 11 – 17, 2013)

Jim warned me a few weeks ago, and I think I put it in my weekly report, that Washington offers reporters a stream of stories every day. Some days, it can seem like a trickle. Others you get blasted with a firehose. The trick, he said, is to try and get a full glass every day. In week 10, it felt like I was opening myself to the hose. There were four or five policy decisions, or decisions waiting in the wings, that I wanted to write about. I made the calls to follow up on the ideas, mostly of people back in Washington state whom I've never met and have no personal contact with. It made me pine for the summer, when I'll have the opportunity to see the places I'm writing about and meet the people (hopefully!) reading my stories. In any event, we ran into a Missouri graduate at the FOIA seminar at the Newseum on Friday, and I related to her my semester-long uneasy feeling that I'm not covering the issues at the level I think is most useful to my audience. I'm at 35,000 feet every day in D.C. I want to get closer.

The story I'm working on now has potential. I've had to learn about Medicare's legal history. That's the wide-angle scope of the project. But it's about a girl who recently underwent a kidney transplant. The donor was her mother. There's a clear narrative angle here, and while it's also been used by several publications nationwide, the potential remains for some excellent storytelling. It's the most excited I've been about a project in a couple of months.

Which isn't to say the daily coverage I produced last week was unexciting. I jumped at the chance to cover a hearing in the Larry Craig saga, and while I didn't put the
reader in the courtroom like I wanted to, I'm not sure the approach would have been appropriate given the subject matter anyway. Appellate court hearings are, by their very nature, rather dull to the general public for the most part. Testimony can get, for lack of a better term, testy, and having read the briefs I was ready to scrutinize the route the lawyers were taking. At the end of the day, a lot of the important issues I found in the case didn't end up in the story. Because, ultimately, when you have a Republican soliciting sex in an airport stall, you kind of have to stick with that narrative to attract the reader. What he does with his campaign money will always play second fiddle.

I see the finish line in coding. I hope to finish it the middle of this week and finish statistical analysis next weekend. I will hopefully have a draft of my research together by the last day of March. That is what I'm shooting for at this point.

Week Eleven (March 18 – 24, 2013)

I published two policy stories in week 11, both very different experiences that produced different stories. I would call the first, using the definitions laid out by Tom Warhover in Advanced Reporting, an “article.” It deals with an abstract bill that attempts to shift some control of which rare genetic diseases receive research priority from the National Institutes of Health to Congress. The result (http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/mar/22/bill-promotes-sharing-of-medical-research/) wasn't a story that I was particularly proud of. It raised more questions than it answered, and because my interview with the congresswoman wasn't that great, the story was just sort of there. It would have been nice to really get into why Congress felt the need to usurp authority
from a major funding agency within the bureaucracy, but the story just wasn't there. As it stands, it's a nice informative piece on another initiative from an elected representative. Nothing more, nothing less.

I was much more excited about the second piece that published yesterday: a look at Medicare's strange coverage contingencies for young kidney failure patients. In this story, I actually had the narrative of a family facing the prospect of having to pay for expensive anti-rejection drugs after their daughter had received a transplant from her mother. The disappointing part of the story, besides the fact that the federal government refuses to address an anachronism of the system? I was 3,000 miles from the family. If I had been in Cheney, Wash., the story would have been much more powerful. I pieced together what information I could over the phone and from the three different accounts of the mother, father and girl and this is what I came up with (http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/mar/24/chenev-family-caught-in-medicare-quirk-after/). Perfect by no stretch of the imagination, but the narrative made the story read better than the other article. I learned from this experience about the practical implications of newsroom short-staffing. After months of reporting on the new health care law, there simply were no reporters in Spokane to cover this story once we'd gotten the tip. Since it had some federal ties, it landed in my lap.

On the research front, I've finished coding. All that's left is putting the data into SPSS and seeing what the articles told me (if anything). I also still need to get a firm answer on the discrepancies in resources on statehouse reporting between 2008 and 2012
from the Denver Post. I will make that my priority this week as well as producing my data. With Congress in recess, I plan to spend Friday writing up my results and putting the pieces of a draft together. Hopefully it will hit your inboxes by next weekend.

I want to say a few brief things about our seminar this week before I sign off. I wish I'd spoken with Barbara about my Communications Law term paper last semester (maybe we can do that some afternoon this week), because cameras in the courtroom (despite my print leanings) are a huge deal for me, even from my days as an undergraduate political science student. I understand, speaking to the PIO at the Supreme Court, that we weren't going to get a firm answer on the court's position. But arguments from Scalia and others that video feeds would foster grandstanding among the justices ring hollow when he makes boisterous appearances on the Fox News weekend shows. The vetting process is televised. The opinions are public documents. We know who these people are. A lot of the mystery of how government works would be stripped away if these hearings were made public. Isn't that the purpose of the courts — to make legislative and executive action more transparent through an interpretation of their legality?

Week Twelve (March 25 – 31, 2013)

Once again, a recess week put a break on the pace of reporting in Washington. Add to that the fact that I wasn't asked to produce content covering the Supreme Court arguments on gay marriage, and it was an extremely quiet week for me. Though I didn't publish, I was doing background reporting on two in-depth policy stories that now don't
seem to be going anywhere. I spent most of the week, when I wasn't working on my research project draft, combing through Federal Election Regulatory Commission records on new hydropower dams. There's legislation afoot from our congresswoman, Cathy McMorris Rodgers, that would make it easier for small public utility districts to get reduced-scale projects off the ground. After trying to track down an affected party for several days, and trying in vain to get some comment from the big boys, I'm about ready to give up. I had a long conversation with Jim about that story and another sort of weedy legislative piece I'm interested in Friday. While he commended my background work, he reminded me there's something to be said for knowing when to cut your losses as a journalist, and understanding that the big legislative stories you have in mind may not mean much to the general public.

That last realization is something I know I'm going to continue to grapple with as a mature as a reporter. There's a part of me that's a political scientist, through and through. That part becomes fascinated by the legislative process and the drama of big government decision-making. To be sure, there's a need for that kind of reporting. But for a regional or city newspaper, the emphasis should always be on people. Does it matter that the federal government is bickering over licensing issues for hydropower dams, or how much money is going into a certain job-training program? Not if it doesn't affect people at the local level. Of course, every policy affects people in some way. But if you can't illustrate it in a very personal way, is it worth writing the story? Sometimes yes, and
sometimes no. It's a question I know I'm going to have to keep asking myself moving forward in this business.

I've submitted a draft to Prof. Moen of my research project, and he's kindly returned it to me with notes. I'd be happy to send it along to the rest of you as I work on edits this week and prepare for my imminent defense. Thanks so much, and let me know if you have any questions.

*Week Thirteen (April 1 – 7, 2013)*

Another recess week, another week to ponder my research project and get ducks in the row for when the cats return to the Capitol. A policy story I wanted to do on hydropower fell through after insistent reporting on my part. I sat down to map out an outline on the story Wednesday and, much like a Supreme Court justice, found the damn thing wouldn't write. There were a lot of important policy decisions being made, and once the law is passed it will be interesting to see what effect it has on behavior. But right now there are too many question marks and too many hydropower flunkies trying to shape the story. I talked to Jim about it and it's in the back of my head for this summer, but it was extremely frustrating watching that reporting work go down the tube. Lessons learned.

Though I did publish this week, the most productive thing I did was go out for drinks with a reporter for a conglomerate of Maine newspapers working out of the capitol. I met him through work on my research project and made plans to talk shop at some point before I skipped town. We had a few beers during happy hour Thursday and I
was surprised to find that he, although he'd been covering state politics for 15 years and had been in Washington since last summer, was running into the same petty things and professional difficulties I've been having. Press secretaries who hold a grudge, backbiting in interviews, the feeling that what we're producing isn't idyllic “journalism” — he had many of the same concerns I did. We pondered whether it was the political climate, the distaste for politics as gamesmanship or our own inherently wonky interests. We split the tab without coming up with an answer.

Friday's seminar was fascinating. I took Communications Law with Charles Davis last semester, so these concepts (right to privacy, content ownership, libel) were still fresh in my brain. But coming at it from the standpoint of a legal professional was a refreshing counterpoint to all the scholarship imparted in the classroom. I wish we'd had more time to ask Mr. Weiswasser a bit more about his involvement in the Food Lion case, but aside from that, the 2 hours were incredibly informative and engaging. I would have liked to ask a question about clients, because it seems to me those who defend the First Amendment by necessity find themselves protecting speech they don't agree with. We likely couldn't have got into specifics, but I got the sense that both could cite times in which they were exasperated with the editorial decisions that were made and their need to defend them in court. I think we could have got them talking for well into the evening on that subject.

I've almost cleared up the edits from Prof. Moen on my research project. I need to speak with a Main editor just a little bit more to nail down their resources during the last
two election cycles. If I can get that accomplished, I'll send along an edited version for review to whomever would like to see it at this stage. I'm also working on the evaluative piece that needs to go with the report (what I learned and how I feel about my work) and piecing together my clips into the much longer .pdf that will be turned in at the end of the semester. I can send that along as well, just let me know.

*Week Fourteen (April 8 – 14, 2013)*

After two quiet recess weeks, I had little chance to catch my breath during Week 14. The NRA picked up and distributed a story I wrote late last week about one of our senators, Jim Risch, who would be fighting the U.N. Arms treaty bill if brought to the capital for approval. I ignored the threats of a gun control filibuster coming from Risch and his counterpart Mike Crapo once it became clear their obstruction wasn't going to kill a vote. I spent the rest of the week trying to track down sources for a profile of Congressman Raul Labrador I'll hopefully be writing before I leave D.C. in two weeks. Many national writers have taken a crack at the tea party darling as he's at the forefront of immigration reform discussions in the House, so I've been trying to tap our Idaho connections to give the piece a regionalized feel to it. So far, I've spoken with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle in the Idaho Legislature who worked with Labrador when he was a state lawmaker. I tracked down an interesting tidbit about a supposed fistfight challenge (!) proffered to Labrador by another Republican, but when I called the lawmaker he refused to talk to me, saying he couldn't be sure I was actually a journalist for the Spokesman. Apparently, that's how they do politics in Idaho.
I have a couple of concerns as I get set to write this piece on Labrador. First, I've already received some inklings his press folks will try to influence what I write. Of course, that's been a phenomenon I've experienced multiple times this semester, so it's not a particularly nagging concern. The other worry I have is that I agree with a lot of his political principles. Limited government, increased emphasis on the private sector to provide services and ending wasteful spending are all ideas I'm behind 100 percent. In my time writing this semester, the political issues have been so abstract and I'm so far removed from the concerns of Washington state residents that it hasn't been difficult to cloak my political beliefs in my writing. A healthy cynicism of the efficiency of the federal government has grounded me. I'm hoping that my affinity for Labrador's ideas won't turn my story into a puff piece.

I'll say a few quick words about the symposium before I sign off. My mind was firing with ideas and connections all day, particularly during the afternoon session about bringing in a participating audience to a public affairs program. Social media networks are, by their very nature, dependent on the ability to attract an audience. Market penetration is the biggest concern I would have about such a program. Alexis de Tocqueville said that the most important function a newspaper had was its ability to put the same idea in the minds of a diverse audience. While all television programs make a mad dash for eyeballs, the success of a public affairs program based on social media particularly is contingent upon attracting an audience that knows you're out there and willing to contribute every week. In the comments of newspaper websites, it's the same
five people yammering at each other, most of the time. I would have liked to hear a bit more about how Channel 9 gets around that.

*Week Fifteen (April 15–21, 2013)*

I found it difficult to keep my mind on work throughout my fifteenth week in D.C. On Monday, the bombing in Boston took over the news cycle and never really let go until Friday night. In addition, my girlfriend was in town, tossing my reporting routine into disarray. I sounded like a beached whale on the phone with a sinus issue for most of the week, which made reporting all kinds of interesting. I also had a couple false starts in writing my profile piece on Raul Labrador, including the middle of the week when I didn't think I was going to get the sit-down at all. That changed Thursday, and I'm getting set to talk with the congressman Tuesday afternoon. The tension is still there, but at this point I feel extremely prepared. My thoughts are on other things at this point, including getting my paper in final form and defending the project. But I tend to do my best writing when I exhale, take a step back, and reflect on the work I've done to that point. I'm thinking that will take up most of my Wednesday, and I'm hoping to go out with a bang with one final well-written piece before I make preparations to head to Spokane for the summer.

It's been impossible, in the last seven days, not to look back at what I've done, what's going on in journalism, and where I see myself in all of it. I took a long time before writing anything about Boston, and when I did it was just for my personal blog. As a runner myself, I felt shocked — just as I did last summer as a movie enthusiast when I
heard of the Aurora tragedy. What followed was an even more shocking display of how I imagine journalism is going to take place for the foreseeable future. Technology affords us perhaps the most compelling way to cover events of the magnitude we saw this week. It also makes me very, very wary about the profession and how much trust will have eroded when I find myself in a position of influence in the industry, assuming there's an industry to speak of that I may influence in the future. There will be plenty of finger-pointing, and I myself engaged in it throughout the week. I appreciate the thoughts brought up in class about how difficult it is to do a live shot, and how the strictures of 24-hour television coverage demand a type of reporting where errors are going to happen. I'm also aware, being plugged in as I am, that this week will only continue to erode what little public trust the public has left in traditional journalism. That's the world I'm going to inherit, and it does more than give me pause when thinking about the profession I will (hopefully) be inheriting.

*Week Sixteen (April 22 – 28, 2013)*

A confluence of academia, Spokane luminaries and an interview with Rep. Raul Labrador capped an eventful semester in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, the fog of the White House Correspondent's Dinner has clouded my ability to reflect all that much at the end of a very eventful week, but I shall do my best to press on. My interview with Labrador, and the subsequent truncated writing process, were less than what I would call an ideal note to go out on. Since I received this assignment, everyone from the National Journal to the Girl Scouts of America weekly bulletin has profiled this guy in some way
or another. The sources that I spoke with were primarily political, and when we chatted the conversation seemed to (either naturally or orchestrated by him) stray to politics. So the story I wrote was more or less an explanation of Labrador's political ambitions, as I and members of his past understand them. I will say that the concerns I had about liking him and his policy positions clouding my neutrality were not an issue. I like the man. We shared quite a few laughs. But it was clear, from the moment I sat down in that room, what our roles were. I'm still working through the drafting process, and I hope the piece publishes during these in-between days as I'm prepping for work in Spokane and finishing up my project.

Meeting the president, Paul Rudd, Gerard Butler and all the other incredibly not-normal people at the dinner was undoubtedly a great cap to a semester of privilege in D.C. I got the chance to write, pretty much every day, on politics. If you would have told me I'd be doing that five years ago, I'd have quivered and then likely hid somewhere to avoid the responsibility. I feel tremendously honored for what I've done and Saturday night felt incredibly unworthy of the plaudits showering down from everywhere. When the parties had died down and I was horizontal in my bed, though, the experiences that popped into my mind were of the days immediately following state championships in high school. I felt I'd accomplished much, but I was wary of growing complacent. I knew more work was ahead of me. That's exactly how I feel now. This project and semester are over. But my career in journalism has barely started.
Chapter 3: Learning in D.C., or How I learned to stop worrying and love the federal government

My original intentions for this project were threefold. I wanted an opportunity to publish (with relative frequency) at the Spokesman-Review to beef up my admittedly sparse portfolio. I wanted to produce stories that looked at policy in-depth using the gamut of my journalism skills. Finally, I wanted to hone my reporting skills with on-the-job expertise in one of the toughest places to gain access. I have mixed feelings about my success on these three points, though I've come to learn that my expectations may not have been grounded in reality when I stepped off the plane four months ago.

The Spokesman-Review did offer me ample column real estate. Perhaps more than my coverage warranted, on occasion. I was frustrated by the pace of the news cycle on Capitol Hill. Things that would have seemed trivial in covering political news elsewhere (a statement condemning the president for this or that from a lawmaker, for example) commanded my attention on a day-to-day basis. It changed the way I wrote, in fact. In one of my many educational talks with Jim Camden, he informed me that an unnecessary number of sentences in a draft I'd submitted listed the quoted before the quote.

“Washington is the only place where who said something is more important than what was said,” he told me. But that didn't mean that I had to write that way. One more tip to go in the increasingly hefty notebook of advice I received throughout the semester.

Every policy story, by comparison, was a process story, which meant that I had to think long and hard about what the impact was. I didn't always get it perfect, or even
right. I'm particularly wary of a story I published about “pediatric research networks.”

Originally drawn to the piece of legislation because of a profile I wrote last semester, I thought speaking with a legislator and researchers would yield a compelling human interest story about why the system needed reform. It turned out to be an interesting “support vs. innovation” argument piece but not one that had any sense of urgency or answered the “so what” question to a satisfying degree. It was much easier to write about a girl on Medicare who wouldn't be receiving federal money for anti-rejection drugs for her kidney transplant after three years because of a quirk in the system. That story attracted many more readers and offered richer narrative opportunities, and it was a story I was particularly proud of this semester.

In short, I'm satisfied with my level of production this semester. I think if I'd have had an editor in closer proximity to me with whom I could bounce ideas, I may have been more productive. But, I'm told, that's the plight of the bureau reporter. You're kind of on your own, a reporter on Capitol Hill for Maine newspapers told me, and editors only proactively seek you when you're missing something. Sometimes it's better to not hear anything at all, Jim constantly assured me. Still, I think constant editorial oversight is something I crave (and received at the Missourian), and moving forward I'm going to have to learn to live without it.

My second goal was to apply the reporting, writing and multimedia skills I'd learned while at the Journalism School into my work in Washington. For the most part, the coverage that I produced was straightforward news writing and gathering. I had the
opportunity with stories about Inauguration Day and the kidney transplant coverage to play with some narrative techniques, but for the most part I found myself doing the kind of writing I've become consistently comfortable with. That is, tackling a major policy issue or initiative, reading through it carefully and questioning lawmakers, experts and the public on the potential impact of decisions. I still think, after a semester of frustrations, false starts and flubs, this is the most essential role a government reporter can play. The most satisfaction I had while in Washington was calling up an expert on a particular area, cutting them off when they start in on the background and asking the illuminating question that allowed me to clear up legislative quirks for readers. That happened infrequently this semester. When it did, I wrote straightforward stories for the paper, rather than any kind of multimedia or nontraditional-format coverage.

I did have the opportunity, outside of my responsibilities with the Spokesman-Review, to try my hand at photography, blogging and a little bit of audio script writing. These are skills I know will be in demand as the industry continues to change, so I'm eager during my time with the paper this summer to get a little more professional experience in those areas under my belt. I did have the opportunity in a few of my stories to experiment with narrative storytelling, though it was never the main focus of anything that I did. That doesn’t overly concern me. While I didn't get as much practice as I envisioned heading into this project, I did stumble across this quote from Tolstoy in my musings throughout the semester: “Happiness is an allegory, unhappiness a story.” In other words, perfection doesn't allow for compelling narrative. In my journalism and
political science studies I've learned that, with the government, there's never a time where everyone's happy. I'll have plenty of opportunities to tell stories in my career.

My final objective was to hone my reporting skills in a place notoriously tough to get scoops, stories and sources. This was especially hard, as I parachuted in with just a few sources of support more than 3,000 miles away. I made many mistakes but tried to limit them to a single occurrence. First, never leave your desk without a pencil and paper. I received a call from a senator, despite not being given a heads-up, while on a walk to another appointment. I scrambled back to the office for my writing materials, all the while keeping him on the phone by tossing him softballs about President Barack Obama's mistakes (he's a GOP member). All the same, you get one shot to ask important public figures a question. Don't dance around the subject, and make sure you're ready. Those were my first two lessons.

Second, plan for the unexpected. On Inauguration Day, I was supposed to get close and try to grab shots of a high school band performing in the parade. I was also supposed to take in the sights on the Mall. I got the phone numbers of everyone I needed to talk to beforehand, and like many other journalists that day, set out for a jaunt through the largest crowd I'd ever seen in my life. Nothing went according to plan; I couldn't even get into the inauguration parade. So I ran back to the office, grabbed a cup of coffee and made phone calls. I ended up producing a fairly decent story that ran on our front page. None of that would have been possible without a few minutes of thinking before I set out.
I picked up a ton of tips about writing. Impact is only a verb when it has something to do with teeth. Declarative sentences are great, but you should balance them with clauses for rhythm. The aforementioned advice from Jim not to lead quotes with who said them, but instead what was said. “Males” and “females” exist only in laboratories and police reports, men and women in the real world. My personal bug-a-boo, passive voice, cropped up many more times than I'd like to admit. With each passing story, I accumulated a list of warning signs I steeled myself to spot. I imagine this is the way I will continue to improve my writing: by beating rules into my brain until they stick, then hopefully addling some poor young writer with them later in life.

As far as the actual act of reporting, I think the one main thing I'll take from the Washington experience is not to be intimidated by anyone. I had the unpleasant experience in the spring 2012 semester of having to interview Barbara Hoppe after she'd taken issue with a story that I wrote. It was the first time I had to face someone hostile to my interpretation of facts, an experience that I found myself confronting again when composing a profile in the fall. In Washington, I had this happen on almost a daily basis. A press representative had read something I'd written and believed I left out important information or misconstrued a statement by his or her boss. At first, this hit me pretty hard. After speaking with Jim and other reporters on the Hill, I realized this was a rather common practice. If I allowed myself to take all of these calls personally, I'd never make it in the district. Of course, I listened to the input of the press folk, and if they had a legitimate beef (infrequent) I would do something about it. But it strikes me that
everyone in Washington is hypersensitive to the message getting to the constituents back home. So writers for bureaus and regional outlets get the flak that might otherwise be directed at the more boisterous and insinuating claims of the Capitol Hill publications, which often get away with murder in their speculating. I committed myself to maintaining a respectful working relationship with press secretaries, and I found honesty to be the overwhelmingly best policy.

The most important experiences I had in Washington were those that revealed what I don't want to be doing. I came into this journalism thing late, learning about politics and literature first. As a result, I haven't had many unpleasant experiences that showed me what I don't want to be doing, as opposed to what I enjoy. While the Washington experience was overwhelmingly positive as a whole, I realized that writing about federal-level policy really isn't for me. I appreciate what Alan Ehrenhalt told us in a seminar: that writing about people in the Legislature is perhaps the most fruitful outlet for relaying public affairs news. The problem to me, after reading what others have produced and what I myself was guided into covering during my time on the Hill, is that this has resulted in the kind of gamesmanship journalism that turns me off as a reader.

In preparation of my research project, I read an article that suggested journalists revert to the game frame because it offers them the ability to predict with authority. This gives them a sense of superiority and expertise that they exploit in the crafting of their stories. In writing about the personality of legislators, I think many Washington journalists exploit their knowledge of personality to project where a particular piece of
legislation is going, or whether a member will withstand a campaign challenge. The focus, then, is not on how personality shapes policy but how policy outcomes are shaped by personality. The biggest example I saw of this was an admittedly interesting piece in Politico about Mitch McConnell's calculating ways, and how his traits may affect the future of the Affordable Care Act. I learned nothing about the legislation from that piece, or how it might affect my life. I learned nothing about McConnell's history and how it informed his opinions on a state-run health care system. I learned only about the political process of passing legislation and how Republicans are out to get Democrats.

This is not to be overly critical of that type of journalism. I understand its importance, especially in Washington. But it's not the kind of writing I want to be doing. I like seeing the direct impact of legislation on people, and I fear that Washington may not be the best place for me to do that. It becomes a kind of echo chamber, where nothing I'm doing has any bearing on readers in Spokane. That could be because of my inexperience, but I get the sense from other reporters that the concerns are the same whether you've been here four months or four years. While I am very grateful for the opportunity to come here as a Washington Press Correspondent's scholar, what I've learned is that I'd be just as happy — if not happier — being closer to who's reading me, both physically and metaphorically. Maybe some day I will feel confident enough in my news judgment and journalism skills to return here and report for an audience back home. But I need to build up my skills first.
Chapter Four: Abundant physical evidence of work at the *Spokesman-Review*

I have compiled a list of hyperlinks to work published online while working for the *Spokesman-Review* available at my blog. The direct link is misplacedjayhawkreporter.wordpress.com/spokesman-portfolio. Appended to these pages are clips of my work as they appeared on the *Spokesman's* website in .pdf form. I have also included a few snippets of running commentary I produced (with the incredibly witty title of “Hill on the Hill”) throughout my time in Washington. These posts appeared on my personal blog, not in the pages of the *Spokesman-Review*. 
WASHINGTON – For all the talk about the National Rifle Association as the key player in defeating gun control proposals in the Senate last week, the hunting and wildlife lobby also played a significant role.

Safari Club International touts itself as a lobbying leader on Capitol Hill for hunters' rights and wildlife conservation. Between 2011 and 2012, the group gave nearly $400,000 to congressional candidates, including $2,000 to Sen. James Risch, R-Idaho, and $1,000 to his counterpart, Sen. Mike Crapo. The Idaho pair was among 14 senators, and several Safari Club beneficiaries, who threatened a filibuster on gun control legislation pushed by President Barack Obama and Senate Democrats.

Also receiving Safari Club funds, according to campaign contribution filings, was North Dakota Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, one of five Democrats who voted against a bipartisan expanded background check proposal. She received $1,000 from the group’s political action committee based in Tucson, Ariz., on March 6.

The Safari Club, along with the NRA and a host of other hunting and wildlife organizations, sent a letter to Senate leadership earlier this month urging cautious, “constructive” steps toward gun control reform. Chief among their recommendations was changing the background check system to better catch felons “without criminalizing private transfers.”

Safari Club spokesman Nelson Freeman said the group favored a Republican-backed alternative to the bipartisan plan that beefed up the National Criminal Instant Background Check System but did not close the so-called “gun show loophole,” in which firearms purchasers are exempt from checks at certain events.

"It wasn’t clear what would have qualified for a gun show," Freeman said of the bipartisan bill. He said members were concerned the laws could affect everything from the
large-scale Safari Club convention, which draws around 20,000 people, to local Rotary Club swaps.

That amendment also did not receive the 60-vote threshold needed for inclusion in the legislative package.

Background checks remain at staggering levels since peaking nationally in December. In Washington state, background checks conducted by the FBI in March were up 30 percent compared to last year; in Idaho, they were up 25 percent. Monthly totals in both states nearly doubled what they were in March 2010.

While Obama and Senate Democratic leadership have vowed to take up the issue of gun control again in the coming months, Freeman said his organization was satisfied with last week’s outcome.

“Safari Club, and the millions of hunters around the country, feel that their interests were represented by the votes that were taken,” Freeman said.

Kip Hill, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.

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Spin Control

Senators weigh in on FAA tower closure plans

Posted by Kip Hill
April 12, 2013 9:57 a.m.  0 comments

WASHINGTON — Powerful Congressional voices on transportation issues, including Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington, admonished the Federal Aviation Administration for plans to shutter control towers nationwide as a result of federal spending cuts, including Spokane's tower at Felts Field.

Cantwell joined six of her colleagues on Capitol Hill to sign a letter insisting the agency look at other options to comply with mandated federal spending cuts. The signees warn the closures, which would hit 149 towers under contract with the FAA, could have air safety ramifications that have not yet been looked at closely.

"It is deeply troubling that the agency seems intent on proceeding with the closure of key air traffic control assets absent adequate safety data and study," the legislators wrote in a letter delivered to Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and FAA Administrator Michael Huerta on Thursday.

The Felts Field tower was scheduled to close April 7, but the FAA delayed those plans until June 15. The Senate Commerce Committee plans to hold a hearing next week to press officials on the affect federal budget cuts would have on air safety. Huerta will be among those testifying.

Cantwell was among several Commerce Committee members who signed the letter, along with Committee Chairman Sen. John D. Rockefeller IV, D-W.Va., Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., and Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H.

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WASHINGTON – Seattle businesswoman Sally Jewell cleared the final hurdle Wednesday to lead the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The Senate voted 87-11 to name the head of outdoor retail giant REI as secretary of the department.

Concerns about Jewell’s position on public land use, past association with conservation groups and local wildlife issues could not derail a nomination that drew praise from both sides of the partisan aisle for reflecting both the interests of industry and the environment.

“I’m excited that we’re going to have someone with a business background and a science background at the Department of Interior,” Sen. Maria Cantwell said on the Senate floor, urging Jewell’s confirmation. Sen. Patty Murray also voiced her support of Jewell, who after a stint as an engineer with Mobil served on the University of Washington Board of Regents and on the board of the National Parks Conservation Association.

Her involvement with the parks association drew criticism from Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyoming, during Jewell’s confirmation hearing before a Senate panel last month. Barrasso said the group filed lawsuits harming job creation and energy production during Jewell’s time on its board. Barrasso joined 10 of his Republican colleagues voting against Jewell’s nomination.

But Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, seemed placated by Jewell’s willingness to discuss the federal government’s position on sage grouse, the ostentatious flirting birds of Idaho’s sagebrush plains. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has considered naming the sage grouse an endangered species under federal law, which has drawn criticism from Risch and others for potentially closing public grazing land to ranchers in Western states.

Risch hinted he might block Jewell’s nomination if he didn’t receive assurances the federal government would continue to meet with the states to develop a plan for the species. But Risch made no effort to stall the nomination vote Wednesday and voted to confirm Jewell.

Jewell replaces Ken Salazar, the former senator from Colorado who has headed the department since January 2009. She attended high school near Seattle and graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Washington in 1978.

Kip Hill, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.

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Journalists and Obama, Romney digital directors dish on Twitter’s political impact

BY RJI ON APRIL 9, 2013 0 COMMENTS IDEAS

By Annie Pechenik and Kip Hill

To describe Twitter’s impact on the 2012 presidential election, journalists and strategists for the Mitt Romney and Barack Obama campaigns turned to metaphor.

The virtual barstool, or water cooler. A third arm. The soundtrack to television news. Accelerant for media firestorms. Poetic descriptions aside, panelists at the Curtis B. Hurley Symposium at the National Press Club said Twitter had a profound impact on their daily job requirements, speeding up the news cycle and increasingly shifting the conversation from pundits to the public.

Teddy Goff, digital director for the Obama campaign, said the challenge wasn’t attracting followers but creating content that would encourage users to get involved. The Obama campaign attracted 34 million Facebook fans, whose friends comprised 98 percent of the social media giant’s user base, Goff said. But the digital team’s goal was content-based.

“We had a three-word slogan: Don’t be lame,” Goff said. Posting about LGBT and woman’s issues, for example, led to more interaction from followers than attacks on Mitt Romney.

Zac Moffatt, digital director for the Romney campaign, agreed with the content-based approach to staking out a social media strategy.

“You don’t win with the biggest list or best Facebook page,” Moffatt said. “You win because you engage with (followers).”

The Washington Post’s Karen Tumulty and Politico’s Jonathan Martin said Twitter had become an important news-gathering tool, but they challenged journalists to provide context and expertise not possessed by the masses.

Moderator Barbara Cochran, Curtis B. Hurley Chair in Public Affairs Journalism, noted that citizens and candidates can use social media to communicate directly with the public and asked the panel, “Who needs journalists anyway?” After a pregnant pause, Martin said it was experience that makes the difference.

“People don’t have time in their day to watch three campaign events,” Martin said. Journalists can offer their in-depth knowledge of a subject to pin down elected officials and illuminate the subtext of political discussion.

But Tumulty said citizen journalists, using Twitter as a mouthpiece, can turn traditional journalists on to stories that wouldn’t otherwise be told. She used the example of a lone blogger combing CIA documents about interrogation techniques and what she learned when interacting with commenters on the Time Magazine blog Swampland.

“I found that the more I did it, the more that they became a community and the more valuable their feedback became to me,” Tumulty said. The comments actually sharpened her reporting skills, she added.
Twitter’s Washington Sales Director Peter Greenberger said the platform brings together the views of traditional journalists, campaign operatives and the general public in a way that organically shapes a campaign narrative. He used the example of the now infamous “Etch-a-Sketch” flap by a top Romney adviser following the primary campaign.

“That played into a narrative,” Greenberger said. “If it doesn’t touch a nerve, if people don’t see some truth in it, I don’t think it takes hold.”

This is the lesson campaigns must learn in the future in order to be successful reaching out on social media, Goff and Moffatt said. Panelists were unsure how social media would affect campaigns in the next cycle, but they agreed a strong, focused strategy from the outset would be a key to victory.

“Content is what is going to crush people in 2016,” Moffatt said.
Idaho’s Risch vows to stall U.N. arms treaty - Spokesman.com ...

WASHINGTON – An international framework for controlling the global arms trade appears to be headed for a brick wall on Capitol Hill, and Idaho’s junior senator is among the chief bricklayers.

“Save your ink. It’s not going anywhere,” U.S. Sen. Jim Risch said this week.

The United Nations arms trade treaty, approved by an overwhelming majority of countries Tuesday, seeks to regulate an industry that topped $85 billion in 2011, according to the Congressional Research Service. But the Senate will have the final say on whether the United States joins the pact. Risch and other senators on both sides of the aisle bristle at the agreement, which they fear could infringe upon Americans’ Second Amendment rights and expand international control over domestic affairs.

“One of the best ways (the U.N.) can expand is by passing these treaties that deal with things that should be dealt with by us,” said Risch, a Republican from Boise serving on the Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee.

Secretary of State John Kerry has tried, so far without success, to ease Senate concerns about the treaty.

Lauding its U.N. passage Tuesday, Kerry disputed suggestions that the treaty trumps the Second Amendment. A preamble in the agreement’s language reaffirms “the sovereign right of any State to regulate and control conventional arms exclusively within its own territory.”

The agreement calls for nations to establish an arms sale registry, similar to a program already codified in U.S. federal law. The registry would include everything from tanks to “light weapons,” to help prevent such items being sold to rogue nations and terrorists. Opponents, including the National Rifle Association, worry that could pressure the United States to enact similar measures for civilian gun sales.

“Whenever you pass these treaties, you always get hit by the law’s unintended consequences,” Risch said.

Should President Barack Obama send the agreement to the Senate, it would need 67 votes for ratification. But just two weeks ago, in the early morning hours of debate on a budget resolution, Risch and Sen. Mike Crapo, another Idaho Republican, were among 53 senators – including eight Democrats – signaling their intent to block ratification. Washington Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, both Democrats, have raised no objections.

Judd Deere, a spokesman for Crapo’s office, said the senator’s opposition was based on the treaty’s vague language and what appears to be exclusive U.N. authority over interpretation.

The Senate already has its hands full with a slate of gun control legislation when it reconvenes Monday. The White House is reviewing the U.N. treaty, and if it receives Obama’s signature it would...

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go before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., chairman of the committee, said the treaty would receive "a vigorous and fair review." Risch, a member of the committee, said he was uncertain whether the agreement would hit the Senate floor at all.

Similar concerns about encroachment of U.S. sovereignty doomed a U.N. treaty addressing discrimination against those with disabilities in December. The Senate mustered a majority for that treaty, originally signed in 2006, but couldn't reach the votes needed for approval. Crapo and Risch also voted against that agreement.

Kip Hill, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.
McMorris Rodgers invitee denied visa - Spin Control - Spokes...  

Spin Control
McMorris Rodgers invitee denied visa

April 2, 2013 12:55 p.m. - 3 comments

WASHINGTON — An Indian leader invited to the United States by U.S. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers and other lawmakers has previously been denied entry.

A U.S. Congressional delegation including McMorris Rodgers, R-Spokane, invited Indian government executive Narenda Modi to talk about economic development last week. The three lawmakers visited Modi in India last week.

But Modi, chief minister of the Indian state of Gujarat, has been denied a visa because of a religious clashes in 2002 that killed more than 1,000 Muslims and Hindus on his watch.

The visit to India by McMorris Rodgers, Reps. Aaron Shock, R-Ill., and Cynthia Lummis, R-Wyo., and several American businesspeople took place over 10 days and included accommodations in lavish hotels, according to records obtained by Hi India, a Chicago weekly newspaper covering South Asian politics abroad. McMorris Rodgers’ office told the Post via email that the congresswoman only spent two days on the trip, which was funded by a Chicago-based political action committee.

Gujarat is located on the west coast of India and has a population exceeding 50 million. It is a locus of Indian economic activity. In 2012, Forbes magazine called it “perhaps the most market-oriented and business friendly of the Indian states,” attracting investors from General Motors and Ford.

Roughly nine out of 10 Gujarati citizens are Hindu, and a majority of the rest are Muslim, according to the Indian Census Bureau. The 2002 discord was sparked by a Muslim attack on a train carrying Hindu pilgrims. The unrest lasted off and on from the end of February through June, mostly in northern and central Gujarat.

McMorris Rodgers’ office has been asked for comment.
Tomorrow and Wednesday, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in two cases with implications on the country’s policy towards same-sex marriages: Hollingsworth v. Perry, stemming from a California state law, and U.S. v. Windsor, a legal challenge of the Defense of Marriage Act.

With Congress in recess, media and public scrutiny have crossed First Street to the masked facade of the Supreme Court building (the columns are undergoing restoration), at least for a few days. Stanchions already block off the so-called “press pit” and the public has been lining up since Thursday to cram the chambers of the nation’s highest court in what is sure to be a riveting two days of oral arguments.

Everyone else will have to settle for transcripts and audio recordings captured by a device that makes the organ the Phantom of the Opera played looked positively futuristic.

Why, you ask? Because federal courts don’t allow cameras. The reasoning, as has been borne out in both public comments from justices and legal briefs on the subject? The cameras would make a mockery of the nation’s appellate courtrooms, shrines where solemnity and decorum are the standard.

"I think there's something sick about making entertainment out of other people's legal problems," Justice Antonin Scalia declared in a 2005 interview.

Several of the justices have shot down the notion that allowing the public visual access to the nation’s appellate courts would serve as a vital civics lesson. Scalia himself scoffed at the notion in 2012, saying most Americans wouldn’t watch the court’s proceedings gavel-to-gavel and instead witness just a small snippet of arguments, “sound bites” that would do more to eviscerate public knowledge than promote it.

What Scalia’s argument (and others like it) ignores is the journalistic professionalism separating amateur videographers from seasoned veterans. Scalia and others talk about courtroom cameras and their tactics as though we’ve learned nothing from 1965’s Fates v. Texas case. Cameras are now so unobtrusive and ubiquitous you’ve probably got one sitting in your pocket at this very moment.

Would we bar pen and pad from legal proceedings, simply because we thought a print journalist might focus on fiery exchanges between justices on a particularly dicey legal question rather than on informing the public? Of course not. So why should the court insist upon holding the hands of broadcast journalists?

Empirical studies are mixed as to whether the presence of cameras intimidates jurors and witnesses to a greater extent than other types of media. But in the appellate courts, that simply shouldn’t matter. These justices are subjected to close scrutiny when they are confirmed in the Senate, and their decisions (especially in the Supreme Court) have a huge impact on the way the law is meted out across the country.
Put cameras in the courtroom tomorrow. At least to spare the folks waiting in that blocks-long line right now from another bout of spring snow.
Budget, budget, who's got a budget?

In the wee hours on Saturday, the Senate became a legitimate answer to that question for the first time in four years. By the slimmest (50-49) of margins, the U.S. Senate adopted a budget resolution for the first time in four years.

But Patty Murray and Paul Ryan aren’t the only ones who had a spending plan. President Barack Obama will release a budget as well. Presumably. The White House has said it will put out its own budget next month, a couple of months past its legal obligation to do so. Before voting on an amended version of Sen. Patty Murray’s committee-crafted budget Saturday, the Senate considered an alternative plan offered by everyone’s favorite filibusterer, Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul (18 conservative members of the chamber — including both Idaho Republicans Mike Crapo and James Risch, voiced their support for Paul’s budget, which eliminated the deficit in 5 years, half the time Paul Ryan’s budget would take to do the same. It is achieved through the creation of what is known as a “flat tax” — a system with a constant marginal rate — and significant reform to entitlement programs like Medicare and Social Security).

The Republican Study Committee, a 170-member, staunchly conservative caucus comprised of GOP House members, released a budget as well, as it has done since 1995. It, too, calls for a balanced budget within the next five years through entitlement program and tax reform. As one might expect, defense spending remains largely sacred.

Not to be outdone, Rep. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., of the House Budget Committee released his own proposal. While functionally similar to the Senate Democrats’ proposal, it does call for an elimination of the deficit around 2040, according to Van Hollen himself. The Senate Democrat version doesn’t suggest any date at which revenue is set to outpace spending, likely a function of Senate Democrats’ belief in the words of Alexander Hamilton:

“A national debt, if it is not excessive, will be to us a national blessing.”

Of course, just what constitutes excessive (or any debt at all) is at the heart of the budget “battle.” What is supposed to happen now is for all these sides to come to the table with their ideas and hammer out a compromise that will be reflected in the work of the separate Appropriations committees throughout the summer. Then, a nice neat set of documents will land on Obama’s desk, and we’ll get back to what Democrats and Republicans alike call “the normal order” of things.

The likelihood of that happening, with midterm elections looming large and huge ideological differences driving the different proposals, is up for debate. It’s worth noting that four Democrats up for re-election in the Senate next
November broke from the party to vote against Murray’s amended budget.

All of this is to say that what we just saw wasn’t really a fiscal argument. Sure, there were numbers and dollar signs and talks of broad-scale tax reform tucked into the document. But, in all likelihood, those numbers, dollar signs and percentages will all change when a final appropriations deal is struck (if it’s struck). What happened into the wee hours of Saturday morning, and to a lesser extent in discussions in the House, was ideological positioning of an expedited order.

Which, is to say, the regular order of things in Washington.
WASHINGTON – Like many high school graduates, Katelynn Janes, of Cheney, made big plans last June: move out of the house, study psychology and eventually counsel young people who have chronic physical ailments.

Kidney failure didn’t make the list. But in December, after months of being lethargic and unable to eat, tests showed her blood was filling with toxins. She needed dialysis right away.

“I thought I was dying when they told me,” she said.

Doctors advised that she was a prime candidate for a kidney transplant. Her parents, Ben and Lisa, were matches, and she received one of her mother’s kidneys in a transplant procedure on March 8. The family calls her speedy path to a new organ a blessing, but it comes with a quirky price tag in federal law.

Despite her young age, Medicare automatically covered Janes’ dialysis costs and also paid for the transplant. But Medicare will only pay for her anti-rejection drugs for three years, and only 80 percent of the cost at that.

Critics say the discrepancy between full coverage for dialysis and partial coverage for post-transplant treatment is an outdated provision of a 1960s-era program – one that can more than double the annual treatment cost paid by federally funded Medicare. Extending medication coverage, despite a hefty initial investment, would save money in the long run and provide benefits to the nearly 20,000 Americans with renal failure who are neither
retired nor disabled, they say.

A ‘ridiculous’ wrinkle in Medicare

Doctors diagnosed Janes, 18, with end-stage renal disease, the only condition for which Medicare has specific benefits. In the 1960s, Medicare promoted dialysis by covering patients’ costs for life because transplants were rare and anti-rejection drugs costly.

Since then, medicines have become cheaper and transplants more common. Anti-rejection drugs now cost a fraction of dialysis payments. A 2012 study from the United States Renal Data System showed Medicare paid between $66,000 and $88,000 per year for a patient on dialysis, compared to around $33,000 for anti-rejection medication. Given the cost of transplant surgery, Medicare savings kick in after about two years of drug coverage.

Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center’s Director of Transplant Services Tim Stevens said the benefits discrepancy is a long-standing issue.

“To us in the transplant world, it’s ridiculous that they would pay for a transplant and then wouldn’t pay for what sustains it,” Stevens said. Janes’ operation was performed at Sacred Heart.

Health care providers pursue all avenues to ensure patients can pay for anti-rejection drugs, including soliciting private foundations and insurance companies, Stevens said. But for patients still years from retirement or who haven’t yet been able to work because of their illness or age, Medicare is the surest avenue of support.

Night and day

Katelynn’s disease caught the Janes family off guard. She’s always been small, Ben Janes said, and her prolonged naps after school and choir practice were never a major cause of alarm.

The fatigue and nausea hit a breaking point in November after she hurt her foot at work. She took anti-inflammatories and developed a persistent rash. The diagnosis came a few weeks later, and she detected the pattern in her yearslong exhaustion.

“If anybody on the outside looked, they’d say, ‘Wow, this girl is really lazy,’ ” she said. “But I wasn’t. It was my body shutting down.”

Dialysis filters out toxins in the blood that would otherwise be cleaned by the kidneys. The
difference after dialysis was night and day, her mother said.

“All of a sudden, she had a little bit of a spark in her,” Lisa Janes said.

That energy only intensified after Katelynn Janes received her mother’s kidney on March 8, but it comes at a high cost. Just one of Katelynn’s prescriptions costs $850 every two weeks, Ben Janes said, and the total cost of her immunosuppressant drugs comes to roughly $2,000 a month. Studies have shown the price tag for anti-rejection drugs leads many people to skip doses, increasing the risk of organ failure.

The potential debt burden has led the family to make tough financial choices, like selling their 2007 Dodge pickup. The $17,000 owed on the vehicle would be better spent on medication, Ben Janes said.

“We want this kidney, this gift that my wife has given, to last as long as it can,” he said.

Still, the Janeses worry about the choices they may have to make when Medicare funding runs out.

“We want so much for her to serve God, to love her family, to have a family,” Lisa Janes said.

**Legislative obstacles**

Revising Medicare benefits to include anti-rejection drugs has largely stalled on Capitol Hill. Though offered as an amendment to the 2009 Affordable Care Act, Medicare spending would have increased by an estimated $400 million between 2010 and 2019 with the extension.

But researchers at Washington University in St. Louis found the plan would save money in the long haul. The initial price tag would be alleviated by the lower cost of immunosuppressant drugs compared to dialysis, lost wages and increased transplant failure. While Medicare spending would rise, the researchers found the net effect to the U.S. economy would be $136 million in annual savings.

The House of Representatives passed a version of the health care law that would have extended coverage for life. In the Senate, however, it was paired with a billing provision that was expected to cost drug companies a hefty sum. The lifetime extension was not in the Senate-passed version of the law signed by President Barack Obama, although the billing provision was enacted in a 2011 adjustment to Medicare law.
Despite previous failures, there is some hope within the transplant community that state health insurance exchanges created through the Affordable Care Act will include support for kidney patients. But Washington state has not yet made clear what – or if – anti-rejection drug coverage will be available.

On the federal level, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., has once again introduced a bill to amend Medicare by extending anti-rejection drug coverage indefinitely.

“This makes no sense morally, medically or economically,” Durbin said of the current benefit structure last month on the Senate floor. Durbin’s legislation sits on the Senate Finance Committee agenda, as it has for several successive Congresses.

**An uncertain prognosis**

Janes’ plans to attend BYU Idaho in Rexburg remain on hold. She hopes to enroll in January. Still, the Janes family – which includes four children ages 7 to 18 – counts itself lucky. Katelynn quickly qualified for a new kidney, and she and her mom are recovering well. Her drugs, while expensive, are few compared with other transplant recipients with more health problems.

Still, Ben and Lisa Janes worry about their daughter’s future, which is largely decided by a system they say is irrational.

While Katelynn acknowledges dialysis saved her life, she said she never wants to face the choice of going back on the treatments. She understands why some young people decide they can’t afford the debt that comes with a transplant.

“They want to be able to go out in the world and experience a good life and get a good job,” she said. “Dialysis doesn’t allow you to do everything.”

*Kip Hill, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.*

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Spin Control

Labrador: Don’t just pass Ryan budget

Posted by: Rip Hall, Correspondent
March 20, 2012 6:05 pm - 0 comments

WASHINGTON - Rep. Paul Labrador, R-ID, emphasized substance over style in the upcoming budget and immigration policy talks Wednesday on Capitol Hill.

Addressing the media with other conservative members of Congress, Labrador said he was encouraged by the ideas behind a budget plan set forth by Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., to balance the federal budget within a decade. He stressed that policy decisions should flow from that benchmark and urged the Republican party to make policy committees, rather than simply passing the Ryan budget which has no force of law.

"Some people in this course believe that the plan is just to pass the Paul Ryan budget," Labrador said, adding his goal is not to pass "a meaningless document by itself, unless we actually implement the policies that will get us to a 10-year balanced budget."

Ryan’s budget is just one of competing visions for a federal government spending plan. Last week, Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., released her own spending bill that would inject several of the Republican House’s key provisions. The Ryan plan calls for no increase in taxes and complete reduction of the deficit by 2023 through reforms to Medicare and repealing the Affordable Care Act. Murray’s budget, on the other hand, calls for nearly $1 trillion in tax increases targeting the wealthy, additional stimulus spending and no fixed date for a balanced federal budget.

Both plans are working their way through Congress. President Barack Obama, also required to release a spending plan by law, has delayed doing so since February, the ire of many Republicans. The White House now expects to release its budget next month.

Labrador is widely hailed as the prominent figure in a potential bipartisan immigration reform deal. Last week at the Conservative Political Action Conference, the freshman congressman reiterated his stance that there should be no new path to citizenship for illegal immigrants in any reform legislation. He called instead for enforcement of existing laws and granting "legal status" to those who entered the country illegally, without the possibility of citizenship.

He responded to comments made earlier in the week by Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., in favor of immigration reform. Paul called for a legal status approach in line with his own beliefs, Labrador said, other than media reports that said he was pushing a path to citizenship. He expressed support for plans to fix what he repeatedly called a "broken system," including several ideas offered by Paul.

"We’re talking about a minor issue," Labrador said of the pathway to
Labrador Doesn't Just Pass Ryan Budget - SpinControl - Spokesman.com - March 20, 2013

Labrador citizenship proposed. “The real issue that we’re dealing with is immigration reform. Let’s fix it.”

Labrador warned labor unions for defeating legislation put forward in the Senate in 2013. That law would have allowed for a new type of temporary visa available to undocumented workers. A bipartisan group in the Senate released a set of principles to guide reform in January that included both a new “tough and fair” pathway to citizenship and admitting more workers into the country.

Any immigration reform legislation in the House would have to be vetted by the Judiciary Committee, said Labrador. He said the window for real reform would probably close in December, when campaigning for the midterm elections would begin in earnest.

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Bill promotes sharing of medical research

McMorris Rodgers supports work on genetic disorders

Kip Hill
Spokesman-Review correspondent

WASHINGTON – Congress marked the last day of February with a resolution calling attention to debilitating but rare diseases.


The Pediatric Research Network Act seeks to improve communication among far-flung research centers and funnel clinical trial data from 20 or so large research institutions to smaller laboratories. McMorris Rodgers, a Spokane Republican raising a child with Down syndrome, said the goal is to break down the walls that often grow up around those studying rare genetic disorders.

“I just think there’s huge potential,” McMorris Rodgers said.

The plan draws cautious support from researchers wary of government funding cuts and bureaucratic red tape, while others say it ignores the current problems facing families with these disorders.

Jeffrey Chamberlain heads the University of Washington’s Paul D. Wellstone Muscular Dystrophy Cooperative Research Center in Seattle. There, he and his research team use state-of-the-art technology to test new treatments for a type of muscular dystrophy that afflicts 1 in every 3,600 boys born in America.

Chamberlain said creating a mechanism to share resources would free him to spend more hours pursuing treatments and a potential cure for Duchenne muscular dystrophy, rather
than spending time searching his own records for published articles and clinical results.

While research breakthroughs have the potential to help future cases, Audrey Burr, a
Spokane counselor who works with families of children with neuromuscular disorders,
questions what’s being done right now.

“Families who live with a child with a significant health condition struggle every single
day,” Burr said. “They have issues with health insurance, with finding care and with
services in schools. Research doesn’t help that a bit.”

For many Washington children, including 50,000 in Spokane County, the state health
insurance program known as Apple Health for Kids helps address those issues, Burr said.
In 2010, McMorris Rodgers led an effort to establish untaxable savings, known as ABLE
accounts, for families dealing with disabilities.

“More and more children with disabilities are now able to live on their own,” McMorris
Rodgers said. “Maybe with some support, but more are getting into the workforce and are
becoming independent. They may need some extra support.”

Meanwhile, the pediatric research proposal would encourage wider access to data
done at large research centers like Chamberlain’s, leading to more coordinated
breakthroughs in treatments and cures, McMorris Rodgers said. The congresswoman used
the example of research on Down syndrome, the disorder her son has, as being helpful to
treat Alzheimer’s.

A government shift from providing services to prioritizing research can present its own set
of problems, Chamberlain said. While research depends on government funding, selecting
which projects to fund should fall to the National Institutes of Health, not the U.S.
Congress, he said.

“The NIH sees the big picture,” Chamberlain said, noting the prevalence of congressional
intervention into the organization’s activities in recent years. “They fund everything. They
need to be given wide latitude.”

The research-sharing proposal provides no new money for research and keeps spending
authority in the hands of NIH. But the law calls for labs conducting clinical trials on
treatments for four specific illnesses, among them Down syndrome and Duchenne, to
receive priority when establishing the network.
Though government spending on health care is a touchy subject in the House, the pediatric research network has received bipartisan support in both chambers on Capitol Hill in recent years. No solid plan has been agreed to yet.

*Kip Hill, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.*

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Spin Control

Spokane and others make pitch for STEM money

Published by sjm on
March 19, 2013 12:15 p.m. 0 comments

WASHINGTON — A group of education and industry professionals from Washington state offered U.S. lawmakers their suggestions to promote science, technology, education and math instruction Tuesday on Capitol Hill.

The meeting, co-hosted by Washington STEM, Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers and Sen. Patty Murray, focused on the skills gap that exists in the four disciplines between graduates and industries. The panel included representatives from Microsoft, Highline School District south of Seattle and Greater Spokane Incorporated President Rich Hadley.

Washington state ranks first in the nation in STEM jobs per capita. However, it ranks 40th in advanced degrees earned by students in those fields.

Hadley stressed the need to align class offerings in early and secondary education with the demands of the modern workforce. He said health care training was key in the Spokane area.

“The life science industry in Spokane is probably the largest benefactor of increased STEM training,” Hadley said. He pointed to several biomedical programs at Spokane Public Schools as successes of STEM-targeted instruction in eastern Washington.

Sen. Maria Cantwell addressed the panel, calling for compulsory computer science education in secondary curricula and expressing her interest in an innovation proposal that would channel funds from skilled worker visa applications to domestic STEM education funding.

Tags
Cathy McMorris Rodgers Greater Spokane Inc. Patty Murray Rich Hadley

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citizenship proposal. “The real issue that we’re dealing with is immigration reform. Let’s fix it.”

Labrador blamed labor unions for defeating legislation put forward in the Senate in 2017. That law would have allowed for a new type of temporary visa available to undocumented workers. A bipartisan group in the Senate released a set of principles to guide reform in January that included both a new “tough and fair” pathway to citizenship and admitting more_workers into the country.

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In brief: Bill covering marketing calls heads to Idaho governor

ROISE - Telephone, cable and other telecom companies would be able to make commercial solicitation calls to their existing Idaho customers even if they're on the state's "do not call" list, under legislation that passed the Idaho Senate 29-6 on Wednesday and headed to Gov. Butch Otter's desk.

The bill, HB 55, proposed by two phone companies, adds those companies to the existing do-not-call exemption for businesses with an existing relationship with a customer. If one of those businesses calls and the customer tells them to stop calling, they can't call again. Violations could mean a $500 fine.

North Idaho senators were split on the measure, with Sens. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint, and Dan Johnson, R-Lewiston, opposing the bill. Sens. John Goedde, R-Coeur d'Alene; Bob Nolte, R-Coeur d'Alene; and Steve Vick, R-Dalton Gardens, backed it. Sens. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood, and Dan Schmidt, D-Moscow, missed the vote.

Betsy Russell

U.S. senators support plan to boost hydropower output

WASHINGTON — A plan to ease regulations and encourage energy production at thousands of the nation's non-power-producing dams earned the full support of the Inland Northwest's U.S. Senate delegation Wednesday.

A companion to legislation proposed by U.S. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers would ease licensing restrictions on small hydropower projects and encourage turbine retrofitting at existing dams. It was introduced with the backing of Washington Sens. Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray and Idaho Sens. Mike Crapo and James Risch. The bill could increase America's hydropower output by 15 percent and create 700,000 jobs nationwide, according to Energy Department estimates.

American Rivers, a conservation group based in Washington, D.C., helped craft the bill.

Under the law, the Federal Regulatory Commission would conduct two-year pilot studies of hundreds of dams eligible for hydropower retrofitting, including 10 dams in Washington and two in Idaho. The bill would also double the maximum amount of energy a dam can produce before having to reapply for a license.

Kip Hill

Killer gets additional 50 years for gouging out inmate's eye

A judge gave convicted killer Michael L. West Jr. another 50 years in prison Wednesday for gouging out the eyes of a fellow prison inmate.

A jury convicted West of first-degree assault in the Oct. 10, 2010, attack at the Airway Heights
March 12, 2013 in City
Craig's legal bills in court
FEC attorney says confession should resolve funding dispute

Ko HH  Correspondent

WASHINGTON – Former U.S. Sen. Larry Craig's efforts to use campaign contributions to pay legal bills surrounding his 2007 sex sting arrest were put under a microscope Monday in U.S. District Court.

The Federal Election Commission considers it improper, but Craig's lawyer contends the agency has allowed at least one other politician to dip into campaign funds to cover expenses under arguably similar circumstances.

District Judge Amy Berman Jackson's questioning of Craig's defense attorney, Andrew Herman, led to establishment of a line of what are permissible uses of campaign money under federal law.

Craig's trouble began more than five years ago when an undercover police officer at a Minneapolis airport accused him of soliciting sex in a public restroom. Craig pleaded guilty to a charge of disturbing the peace, then employed both a Washington, D.C.-based firm and attorneys in Minnesota in an unsuccessful attempt to get the plea thrown out. He retired from the Senate in 2009.

In fighting the charges, Craig paid two law firms more than $200,000 out of campaign coffers. The FEC ruled that was an improper use of public money and sued. Craig's lawyers argue the arrest took place during official duties, prompting the larger legal questions at the center of Monday's hearing.

For what can politicians use donor money?

In Monday's testimony, Herman pointed to the FEC's decision not to prosecute former U.S. Rep. Jim Kolbe of Arizona under what the defense deemed similar circumstances. The Department of Justice booted into a 1996 trip Kolbe made with congressional pages to the Grand Canyon after accusations of misconduct. Kolbe was cleared of wrongdoing, and in 2007 the FEC determined because the trip was made in connection to Kolbe's legislative position, he could use campaign money to cover the investigation.

Herman said the Kolbe decision provided "crystal clear" and "plain vanilla" evidence Craig's case should be viewed the same way. "Any fair reading of Kolbe provides explicit approval of the use of funds for legal purposes," Herman said.

But Jackson took issue with the reading, pointing to the assertion the Justice Department was only looking into the travel of Kolbe, not his specific conduct. Herman countered the FEC had to have known Kolbe was under investigation for inappropriate conduct. Their decision to change the rules in trying Craig, Herman said, was evidence of "buyer's remorse."

FEC attorney Kevin Harrack contends the damning evidence that Craig's behavior had nothing to do with his congressional duties is contained in a letter sent from Craig to a Senate Ethics
Committee panel shortly after his arrest.

In the letter, Craig said the alleged activity was “purely personal conduct unrelated to the performance of his official duties.”

“This case should be resolved by Sen. Craig’s confession,” Hancock said.

Jackson will rule soon on whether Craig will have to repay the legal fees out of his own pocket. The FEC also seeks civil damages from Craig and campaign treasurer Kaye L. O’Rondan.

Jackson’s decision will likely have ramifications in the Bellevue and beyond, as it will interpret laws controlling spending by political officials.

Recent stories in City
- Accuracy watch March 22, 2013
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- Washington Redskins March 21, 2013
- State audited for showing expenditures, cited for budget process March 20, 2013
- In brief: Woman arrested in arson case said she wanted to be in jail March 20, 2013

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9 comments • 1 reaction

Leave a message...
The only thing missing from Washington, D.C.-area weather reports yesterday evening were calls for *falling frogs* by midday.

Labeling the impending snowstorm oh-so-tongue-in-cheekly the "*snowquester*" last night, regional forecasters predicted inches of snow, snarled traffic and Metro delays throughout the nation's capitol. Those claims led to cancellations of work for federal employees, empty train cars and sly rebuttals from much more winter-weary federal officials.

It did not, however, lead to a shutdown of the U.S. Capitol, where the news presses on. And, as you might expect, it's mostly related to fiscal matters.

Before we dive into that swimming pool, let's take a moment to acknowledge a good old fashioned filibuster taking place on the Senate floor as I type. Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., is not happy with the Obama administration and Attorney General Eric Holder for suggesting it would be OK to use lethal force on American soil in the form of a drone strike. Paul is pointing to a letter he received earlier this week from Holder suggesting such action would be justified under extreme conditions.

Now, in order to force the White House's hand on the issue (*which it seems unwilling to do*), Paul is in his third hour commanding the Senate floor and delaying the confirmation vote for new CIA director nominee John Brennan. Majority Leader Harry Reid's hands are tied, Politico reports, because he hasn't filed the paperwork to end debate.

I'll let you know when and if the phone book finds its way to Congress’ upper chamber.

On the budget front, the *New York Times* is reporting that both House and Senate proposals for a FY2014 budget will be unveiled next week. The House version will be authored once again by GOP Vice Presidential hopeful and Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan. Rumors of raising *the age at which Medicare benefits would be awarded have subsided today*, but the plan will likely contain a voucher program similar to the one Ryan’s budget proposal last year, a provision *most Americans aren’t too happy with*.

Meanwhile, the Senate version will come from the desk of Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., who has been holding a series of hearings over the past few weeks centered on what she says is a middle-class focus in her proposal. Expect mandatory spending programs like Medicare and Social Security to receive considerably fewer cuts, if any at all, in Murray’s plan. A hearing held yesterday on expenditures (or deductions) in the tax code suggests GOP and Democratic senators alike may be interested in some tax reform, but Ryan's proposal will likely contain sweeping reform and simplification that liberal stalwarts will likely reject.
And, of course, there’s the issue of funding the government after March 27. In an attempt to beat the snowquester, which has turned into more of a rotten, Sherlockian London-type day here in the epicenter of the district, the GOP has pushed through their version of a spending plan to last into the coming fiscal year that would lessen the blow of the sequester cuts for the military. However, the total amount of the cuts would stay in place under the plan.

This counts as a major weather event in Washington D.C. For future reference.

Think of it this way: The sequester calls for across-the-board cuts of something close to 8 percent for the military, based on projections and the two-month delay in sequestration tied into the fiscal cliff deal. The GOP offer would shift that same level of cuts to different accounts. Instead of a meat-cleaver, as President Barack Obama called it, the cuts would be made under the steady hand of an ideologically driven hand of the Republican party.
The Senate Appropriations Committee, headed by Sen. Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., will be in charge of taking that plan and producing a version the left-led Senate would agree to. Then the two sides will hash out the discrepancies in conference.

They have three weeks from today to do so before a federal government shutdown. Stop us if you’ve heard that one before.

I’d tell you to stay warm, but it’s a wet mess out there. Keep your knickers dry.
March 8, 2013 in City

REI head vetted by Senate committee

Jewell is nominated to be interior secretary

Kb HB Spokesman Review correspondent

WASHINGTON — Interior Secretary nominates Sally Jewell was greeted Thursday by U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Or., who described the job she’s seeking as “almost like an extreme sport for multitaskers.”

That’s the challenge Jewell, head of Seattle-based Recreational Equipment Inc., faced in her confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. Senators peppered President Barack Obama’s pick to head the Interior Department with questions gauging where Jewell would stand on the balance between economic development and environmental conservation, often or issues specifically related to their constituencies.

They also planted barbs against the department and its current secretary, Ken Salazar, for dragging its feet on pursuing energy production on public lands and stressed the importance of those projects moving forward.

Jewell was mostly noncommittal on specific issues, pledging her willingness to meet with lawmakers on specific issues facing individual states.

Sens. Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray of Washington introduced Jewell to the panel. Sitting on either side of the nominee, both women praised Jewell’s business leadership and appreciation of natural resources.

“Science will be her compass, not an ideological bent,” Cantwell said to her fellow committee members.

Criticism of Jewell centered on her association with the National Parks Conservation Association as a board member. Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., called upon Jewell to disclose legal action taken by the organization against the federal government, lawsuits he said tipped up job-creating efforts to pursue energy sources on public lands. He was also concerned about some of the group’s lobbying efforts: tougher regulations regarding commercial use of federal lands.

“Many of us are concerned that (the Bureau of Land Management’s) regulations would push drilling off public lands,” Barrasso said.

Jewell showed support for mixed-use policies and the White House’s strategy of developing a variety of energy sources. She pointed repeatedly to her business background, including time spent as an engineer in Oklahoma for Mobil, as evidence she would be open to tapping resources in an environmentally safe way.

Sen. James Risch, R-Idaho, signaled some of the bipartisan approval Jewell is likely to garner, thanks to her business background.

"I'm so glad to see a CEO come and take over the agency," Risch said. He added that he was "so tickled to hear" Jewell's commitment to working with the committee and Congress.

Obama nominated Jewell last month to replace Salazar, who has served as interior secretary since the president took office in January 2009.

Kip HK, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.

Please keep it civil. Don't post comments that are obscene, defamatory, threatening, off-topic, an infringement of copyright or an invasion of privacy. Read our forum standards and community guidelines.
Quick turnaround on the posts, I know. But I've had an idea eating at me, now that we're in post-sequestration world, and I had to get some thoughts down on paper.

What we're really looking at here, from a sausage-making standpoint, is confusion (and irritation) about explicit vs. implicit government. Implicit government scares us. It's the reason we drafted a Bill of Rights to protect ourselves from the heaving beast that we imagined the federal government would be. Only when we promised such a document, outlining positive rights, would exist did the anti-Federalists cave and ratify the U.S. Constitution. Consequently, these thoughts occurred to me as I was scanning the documents themselves yesterday afternoon at the Archives, peering around running, screaming 12-year-olds and a documents enthusiast who'd brought a magnifying lens and damned if he wasn't going to read the Declaration of Independence in its original format, other viewers be damned.

Sorry. My rancor got the best of me.

The current spat over moving from one fiscal crisis to another, and getting back to the "normal way of doing things" in creating a budget, something the Republicans have used as a talking point against Senate Democrats, vividly outlines a modern incarnation of the implicit government fear. The GOP has a point. We have codified the budget-making process in the past century due to the larger role of federal government spending in our everyday lives. The White House is required by law to submit a budget. Both chambers of Congress are required, by law, to pass a budget resolution. These things are true. But it's also true that this is simply one way of passing a spending plan for the federal government, and like many other devices of our representative democracy, it may not be the most efficient, nor the best way of doing things in this country.

But the goalposts provide placation. They let us know we're moving toward a document that outlines our federal spending, and that certainty in turn breeds economic confidence which can have a positive impact on things like job creation and increased goods production.

The point here is that having things written down is one of doing things. It may be what both political parties desire. It may be what the American public desires. But there are two types of government, and our Constitution (with its brief article on the Judiciary serving as a high-profile example) encourages both.

Let's just hope, if we do right things down, the guy budging us out of the way to snag a peek yields the floor. Eventually.
March 1, 2013 in City

Violence bill grants tribal courts power

Violence Against Women Act now awaits Obama's signature

Kb HI Correspondent

Tags: Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Patty Murray, Violence Against Women Act

Protection for women

The Violence Against Women Act is credited with helping reduce domestic violence incidents by two-thirds over the past two decades. The Senate bill would authorize some $563 million a year over five years to fund current programs that provide grants for transitional housing, legal assistance, law enforcement training and training.

The Senate bill also adds stalking to the list of crimes that make immigrant victims eligible for protection and authorizes programs dealing with sexual assault on college campuses and with efforts to reduce the backlog in rape kit analysis. It reauthorizes the TraffickingVictimsProtectionAct.

WASHINGTON — The Violence Against Women Act now on its way to President Barack Obama’s desk after a years-long delay has deep ties and connections to the Inland Northwest and its U.S. congressional delegation.

Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, is a co-sponsor of the bill that will arrive for Obama’s signature. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., led the charge on the House GOP alternative that was shot down Thursday.

One of the main reasons for the House GOP bill’s failure was its lack of a mechanism for tribal courts to prosecute non-native persons accused of abuse. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., argued for the Senate’s provision granting tribal courts authority over abuse cases as chairwoman of the Indian Affairs Committee. Throughout the process, Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., has maintained staunch support of the Senate version and publicly called out House GOP leadership for failing to bring it to a floor vote.

That changed Thursday, when the House slipped the Senate version to the White House. Before that happened, McMorris Rodgers took to the House floor Thursday morning in an effort to combat Democratic attacks on the Republican version of the bill, saying the focus had been on partisanship in debate on the legislation ‘rather than the victims who would be protected by her version of the bill. She also cautioned the law would not stand up to judicial scrutiny.

‘It is a bill that respects the Constitution and puts the focus on the victim, where it should be,” McMorris Rodgers said of the Republican alternative, which was defeated on a 165-257 vote.

But Murray called the constitutional argument “an artificial red flag,” saying Democrats had consulted with constitutional lawyers who gave the OK on their bill. She said the Senate’s legislation, passed by the House with more than 80 Republican backers, brought to light the often-overlooked issue of violence on tribal lands.

“This has been a silent epidemic, and we’ve brought it out in the open and made a really big step forward.” Murray said.

McMorris Rodgers voted for the Senate version of the act after her version was defeated.

Another feature missing from the House Republican version of the bill was explicit granting of benefits to same-sex couples. Murray said such an extension was vital, given the decision by

www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/mar/01/violence-bill-grants-tribal-courts-power/
Violence bill grants tribal courts power

Washington and several other states to legalize marriage for partners of the same sex.

“I’ve had the opportunity to talk to many members of the LGBT community,” Murray said. “Because the language did not explicitly provide them benefits, they were denied.”

Congress originally codified the Violence Against Women Act, authored by then-Delaware Sen. Joe Biden, in 1994. It has now been renewed three times, and legislation passed Thursday extends benefits, including funding for programs dedicated to stopping domestic violence and legal assistance for victims, through 2019.

Obama has signed it; he will sign the bill.
February 27, 2013 in City, Idaho

Labrador blasts Obama on budget; softens on immigration

Kp Hill  Spokane-Review correspondent

WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. Raul Labrador blasted President Barack Obama on Wednesday for lack of leadership in the sequestration spat, while hinting his willingness to accept some Democratic positions in potential immigration reform legislation.

Labrador, R-Idaho, accused Obama and the media of "scare tactics" in emphasizing the impacts of automatic spending cuts totaling $13.5 billion set to kick in Friday.

"We haven’t had a lot of calls," said Labrador, who spoke with reporters Wednesday and is considered an emerging leader among tea party conservatives. "I’ve had a few people call me concerned about what’s going to do in the meat industry… and all those things."

Referring to reports released by the White House over the weekend, laying out the potential impact of the sequester on a state-by-state basis, Labrador noted that many of the spending cuts wouldn’t take effect immediately. Teacher layoffs wouldn’t occur for several months, and Labrador said that would give schools the flexibility to cut boosted spending through attrition and other methods.

"For the president to go to the nation, and say that we’re going to lose teachers, I’m going to lose cops… that’s pretty shameful, actually, on the part of the president," Labrador said.

Senate Democrats have scheduled a floor vote for their sequester averting proposal, co-sponsored by Washington’s U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, which would combine tax hikes with military and farm subsidy spending cuts and a delay of sequestration-level cuts to next year.

Labrador said he doubts the ability of Senate leadership to push the plan through, noting Republicans in the House of Representatives have passed two budget resolutions that would stave off the sequester, both of which haven’t gained traction in the Senate due to their cuts to entitlement programs.

A handful of Republican congressmen joined Labrador at a "Conversations with Conservatives" roundtable lunch with journalists on Capitol Hill. While the members agreed for the most part on government spending and tax reform, Labrador signaled some openness to immigration reform proposals brought forward by Democrats. But, he said, border security would need to be shored up before any extensions of benefits to illegal immigrants would be offered.

A new pathway to citizenship, however, is "completely off the table," Labrador said.

"If anyone wants to apply for citizenship, they must do that in the same way as any other immigrant," Labrador said.

The Idaho Republican has gained some national prominence, as a former immigration lawyer and young conservative member of the House, in the national discussion on reform. Labrador said...
Repsults should come to terms with Obama’s executive order on illegal immigration, and try to negotiate for stricter enforcement in the current round of discussions.

Though sometimes twisted, the luncheon conversation was mostly cordial throughout, with catered sandwiches from in-the-news fast food chain Chick-Fil-A and some nibbling of Labrador’s rising profile.

Rep. Jeff Duncan, R-S.C., jokingly referred to Labrador as “governor” as the congressman took his seat, which drew a few head shakes and a smile. Labrador has been rumored to be eyeing the governor’s seat in Idaho.


“I agree with Congressman Labrador, and I voted for him for Speaker of the House,” Amash said, laughing from the panel. Amash was the only Republican representative who voted for Labrador over current Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio.

Kip Hill, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.

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Spin Control

In keeping with tradition, and history

Posted by Hip Hill
Feb 25, 2013 9:49 a.m. · 0 comments

WASHINGTON — Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., will begin today's legislative day in Congress with a tradition eating to Washington state's first days as a part of the union.

The reading of President George Washington's Farewell Address, first published in the Philadelphia Daily American Advertiser on Sept. 16, 1796, has been an annual February event in the Senate since 1893, just four years after Washington was admitted to the United States.

However, Washington senators have been largely overlooked for the honor. The most recent — and only — senator from Washington to deliver the address was Republican Miles Poindexter, who gave the speech on Feb. 22, 1922.

Senators recite their favorite and brief passage in a ledger after delivering the address. Poindexter, an assistant prosecuting attorney in Spokane County from 1899 to 1904, kept his remarks brief in the vein of his contemporaries.

"Read by me upon the designation of Vice President Calvin Coolidge, February 22, 1922, in the Senate of the United States," Poindexter wrote, before signing his name.

Poindexter garnered no good luck from his delivery. Fellow Spokan residents Richard and Democratic opponent Clarence Bill defeated him in elections nine months later, and Poindexter never returned to the Senate.

By contrast, Idaho senators have received the honor on four separate occasions, including Fred Duxford of the Silver Republican Party and Democrat Weldon E. Hayden in back-to-back appearances in 1923 and 1924.

Republican Sen. Dirk Kempthorne delivered the address most recently among the Idaho Northwest delegation, on Feb. 24, 1993.

Kempthorne's entry to the ledger echoes the glorified praise for the first president's words that appear in lengthy personal statements made by speakers in recent years. Democrats and Republicans trade turns to deliver the annual address.

"Thank goodness this has become a tradition because as citizens we must never lose our exposure and connection to the principles and wisdom of our Founding Fathers," Kempthorne wrote.

Democratic Sen. Frank Church, the other Idaho senator who delivered the
In keeping with tradition and history, Spin Control, Spokesman.com, Feb 25, 2013

speech, addressed the Senate in 1869.

Washington’s address, which was never delivered in person, is overtly
triumphant and expresses a fear of “faction” among the states that was
common during the early years of the republic. Despite its age, the address
contains foresight of political difficulties that prompted its reading to both
chambers of Congress during the height of the Civil War.

“The name of American, which belongs to you in your national capacity,
must always exalt the just pride of patriotism, more than any appellation
derived from local discriminations,” Washington wrote in 1796.

Ayotte is scheduled to deliver the speech at 11 a.m. Pacific time.

Kip Hill, a graduate student in the University of Missouri’s Washington, D.C.,
reporting program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.

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0 comments

No one has commented yet.

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Kris Carr

Re: Back to Spin Control
Region plans for sequester

February 23, 2013 in City

Region plans for sequester

Parks, schools, Spokane consider cuts in staffing costs

Kb HB Correspondent

Tags: budget, Congress economy, sequestration

What's next

Senate Democrats and the White House have both offered plans that include spending cuts and revenue increases that would avoid sequestration temporarily.

House Republicans have signaled that cuts and tax increases are off the table after the “fiscal cliff” deal made last month. Idaho Republican Sens. James Risch and Mike Crapo have said they think the spending cuts will kick in March 1, as the sides are too far apart to come to an agreement in time.

WASHINGTON — The so-called “sequester” squeeze will cost (insert Northeast school district) millions of dollars and throw into question conservation and recreation programs if implemented.

The deadline is to avert the latest in a series of cuts that politicians on both sides of the aisle describe as fiscal ailments is Friday, when $85 billion in automatic federal spending cuts are scheduled to kick in. The Congressional Budget Office estimates funding for most federal programs will drop by 5 percent or more.

National-scale budget tightening will trickle down to local governments coast to coast. Many public programs in the Spokane area will be forced to make difficult decisions in the short term and long term.

While many education programs would see cuts, the Department of Education has emphasized Title I grants as particularly susceptible to trimming. The federal government doles out Title I grants to school districts based on an equation tied to poverty levels, and Congress has already enacted several reductions to the program in recent years.

Under sequestration, Title I funding would drop by $13 million in Washington and $14 million in Idaho, according to a Democratic-House Appropriations Committee estimate.

Though federal money has already been awarded for the academic year, area school districts said staffing decisions would need to be made over the summer if Congress doesn’t act.

• Spokane Public Schools: Lorns Spear, executive director of student intervention and support services, said cuts to the district could reach $1 million, or roughly 10 percent of the school’s total Title I funding this year.

“There clearly would have to be some sort of changes in our staff,” Spear said.

• Central and East Valley school districts: School board members received a report detailing the impact of 5.9 percent cuts, said Central Valley School District spokeswoman Melanie Rosa. The districts eight Title I schools receive funding totaling about $1.5 million per year.

Central Valley would see about $91,000 in Title I cuts. Such a drop would require the district to consider eliminating two full-time reading specialist positions serving the districts’ 550 elementary students who receive additional instruction. East Valley schools would see Title I funding reduced by about $30,000.

www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/Feb/23/sequreas/
• Mead School District: Dorcas Wylder, executive director of learning services, said she was waiting on final figures from the state before predicting how cuts would affect the district’s Title I staff, which includes 15 paraprofessionals.

  "I keep crossing my fingers," Wylder said of the impending cuts and potential congressional action. "I’m trying to be optimistic."

Hanford cleanup

U.S. Secretary of Energy Steven Chu has been a vocal proponent of cleanup efforts at Hanford. House Democrats warn sequestration could lead to furloughs lasting up to six months for 1,000 federal employees at the former nuclear production facility in south-central Washington.

In a letter to the Senate, Chu mentioned Hanford in his warning that spending cuts would delay cleanup progress at similar installations throughout the country.

"Funding reductions would put numerous enforceable environmental compliance milestones at risk," Chu wrote. The plan to clean up Hanford includes hundreds of such milestones, including removal of certain amounts of waste and construction of treatment facilities, spread over the next 30 years.

The spending cuts could further complicate efforts to construct a waste treatment plant at the site. The project, overseen by Bechtel Inc., has been in the works for decades, and the current contract — valued at more than $10 billion — has been repeatedly revised.

Bechtel spokesman Todd Nelson said the company has plans in place should the spending cuts occur. In a message to employees last week, project director Frank Russo urged employees not to "become distracted by this uncertainty."

National parks, forests

Jay Kirchner of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests in Coeur d’Alene said his office is anticipating cuts approaching 5 percent, though nothing has been finalized.

That would mean fewer seasonal employees, Kirchner said, but likely no furloughs for full-time staffers. Still, the upkeep of the grounds may be affected by such cuts.

"If it happens, I think people will see a difference in their recreational experience," Kirchner said.

The National Park Service is also bracing for cuts approaching 5 percent, according to internal memos published by the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees. While the Park Service has not confirmed final appropriation cuts, internal memos indicate slashes at Mount Rainier National Park totaling more than $600,000 this year could lead to a closure of the Ohanapoch Beach Visitor Center, normally open from June through October.

Fairchild Air Force Base

Col. Brian Newberry of the 92nd Refueling Wing reports funding cuts could lead to more grounded flights and other travel reductions.

"Flying operations at Fairchild, not directly related to readiness, will be curtailed," Newberry said in a statement last month.

Hiring practices could be affected as well. If Congress can’t reach a deal, civilian recruitment could be frozen and temporary employees fired, according to the Department of Defense. Base records show that about 750 civilians work at Fairchild.

Kip HK, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokane Review.
I talked to a Congressional staffer on the fourth day of this, the President's Weekend Congressional brake.

"The city just sort of slows down," she told me. And it's true.

On Monday, I rode the Metro to the office with a gentleman quoting from Revelations and someone in a Slayer T-shirt. And that was it. The irony!

But, from time moving slowly to time not moving at all, here's a few updates from the week that wasn't in Washington:

- Just as in 2012, House Republicans have introduced a version of the Violence Against Women Act that differs significantly from the bipartisan bill that passed the Senate just a few days ago. U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., wasn't having it.

  "It's not a compromise, it's an unfortunate effort to exclude specific groups of women from receiving basic protections under the law," Murray wrote in a statement. "And we cannot allow that to happen."

  Murray vocally called out Speaker John Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor in a floor speech a couple weeks ago, and took to Twitter on Valentine's Day charging the prominent GOP members to pass a version of a bill that Senate Democrats would agree with. A similar turn of events led to Congress not passing a reauthorization of the law last year, which among other things provides resources for female victims of domestic violence to receive legal protection from their attackers.

  If this House version makes it to the Senate floor, Murray signaled history would be repeating itself.

  "This partisan bill is a non-starter in the Senate," Murray wrote Friday.

- Stop us if you've heard this one before, but the United States is headed for a fiscal calamity the likes of which have never been seen.

  This time, it's the so-called "sequester," and while we haven't seen budget sequestration actually go into effect, we've heard the doom and gloom stories before in the days leading up to the New Year and the 2011 "super committee" hearings which led to the specter of sequestration in the first place.

  Senate Democrats and the White House have released plans that would instill tax revenue hikes on the wealthiest Americans, a proposition Republicans in the House and Senate say will damage the ability of small business owners to make a profit, stalling the economy. Some also charge the cuts don't go far enough on entitlement programs that cannot be sustained at their current levels without a complete collapse.

  It's a major philosophical difference in the two parties that has been around for decades, but the partisan
nature of Washington politics and the extreme circumstances (brought about, of course, by government itself) have led us to what can only be described as an unprecedented situation as Congress convenes next week.

But, of course, you never know. History is made every day here. I’ll take both the Revelations and Slayer passengers’ advice:

“Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;” - Revelations, Chapter 1

And, uh, after searching some Slayer music for words of wisdom I lost the mood for jesting. So let’s end on that cheery, end-of-the-world note.
#1 Conservative Risch Not Surprised

Huckleberries Online

Posted by DFO
Feb. 20, 2013 1:23 p.m. | 3 comments

Kip Hill, the SR’s Washington, D.C., correspondent, asked U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, about his ranking as the most conservative U.S. senator by the National Review.

Sen. James Risch said Wednesday he wasn’t surprised by his ranking atop the list of conservative senators in the U.S. Senate. “One of these lists comes out every month or so, and I’m always in the top three or four or five,” Risch said in a phone interview. Risch said Idaho voters sent him to Washington to vote conservatively, and that’s what he continues to do. Risch was one of 22 senators who opposed passage of the Violence Against Women Act, citing concerns about the federal government impeding on state and local authority. He also voted against the debt ceiling measure proposed by House Republicans in January, decrying its lack of spending reductions to offset spending increases. More below.

Question: Are you surprised that former Idaho governor Risch doesn’t have a higher profile in Washington, D.C.?

He gave similar reasons for voting down Hurricane Sandy relief earlier in January, though Risch did vote in favor of the fiscal cliff deal brokered on New Year’s Day. The lack of notoriety mentioned in the National Journal rankings doesn’t bother Risch, who said visibility goes to those who make appearance on cable news shows. He said he turns down invitations frequently. “That’s not what I came (to Washington) to do,” Risch said.

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www.spokesman.com/blogs/hbw/2013/feb/20/1-conservative-risch-not-surprised/
February 17, 2013 in City
Debate on deduction for state sales tax continues
Break for likely to stay temporary

Kp Hill Correspondent

WASHINGTON -- Each year, about a million Washington residents itemize their sales tax receipts and erase their federal tax burden by hundreds of dollars.

For Dashman Dodge Chrysler manager Todd Tuttijia, the ability of Washington residents to deduct what they pay in state sales taxes each year from their federal income tax bill also means more business.

"When you have a buyer who's wanting to purchase a new vehicle, you can show the tax benefit will help them buy down their monthly payments," Tuttijia said.

That's why Tuttijia welcomed U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell to the Spokane Valley dealership in August as part of a bipartisan push to enable Washington residents to keep claiming the sales tax deduction on their federal returns. Four months later, with help from U.S. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers and other members of the state's congressional delegation, a temporary deal was struck to keep the deduction in place through 2011.

The January compromise came just a few months before Washington residents, and those of eight other states lacking state income taxes, would have to file returns without claiming state tax credits. Cantwell said the issue comes down to fairness and promoting business in Washington state.

While the state income tax deduction is a permanent part of the federal tax code, Congress continues to extend the sales tax break for just a year or two at a time. It's enjoyed by more than 1 million Washington taxpayers to the tune of $2 billion annually. The "fiscal cliff" deal marked the fourth time since 2004 that the sales tax deduction was extended on a temporary basis.

With each new Congress, Cantwell seeks to change that.

"It's time for the administration and people to just put this into the tax code," Cantwell said in a recent interview at the Capitol. In January, she introduced for the fourth time a measure that would extend the sales tax deduction permanently.

The legislation has become something of a New Year's tradition for Cantwell, who has powerful allies in both parties in the Senate. But the fate of the deduction is likely tied to the success of larger-scale tax reform, said state and local tax expert Kim Rueben, a senior fellow at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C.
"I think it's more of a political argument than an economic argument," Rueben said. "I also feel like it's going to be almost impossible to get it passed permanently."

A permanent deduction carries a hefty price tag, which makes extending the deduction for longer than a year or two at a time politically unattractive, Rueben said.

Cantwell remains committed to a permanent deduction, despite the difficulties it has faced in the past.

**Former Oregon senator was key**

Before the Tax Reform Act of 1986, taxpayers were able to deduct both state income and sales taxes when filling out their federal returns. President Ronald Reagan and the Treasury Department tried to change that.

"There were a number of people who actually thought they were going to get the deduction for state and local taxes eliminated," Rueben said.

Slade Gorton, a longtime Republican senator from Washington state, was among those following Reagan's lead in 1986, arguing a simpler tax code would make for a more sound fiscal policy and fewer confused taxpayers. But when Oregon's Republican senator at the time, Bob Packwood, chairman of the Finance Committee, introduced a bill that cut the sales tax deduction and kept the income tax deduction, Gorton cried foul. Oregon has an income tax but no sales tax.

"Allowing one tax to be deducted and not another is utterly and completely unfair," Gorton said recently. But Packwood’s plan ultimately became law.

Gorton called the 1986 law one of the great tax reforms in American history. But he had to swallow the defeat of the sales tax deduction for the greater good in simplifying the code, he said.

He said Packwood used his position to unfairly gain an advantage for Oregon taxpayers, and the resulting code that left one deduction in place and the other obliterated was “one of the unhappy elements in my Senate career.”

**Tide turned in 2004**

Throughout the early 1990s, bills were introduced to reinstate the deduction, but none made it to the House or Senate floor.

In 2004 the tide turned, and Congress and the White House came to an agreement reinstating the deduction for two years.

"We were at a point where a number of people who were in very powerful positions were from states with no income tax," Rueben said. "There was a lot of lobbying for this not being fair, and people were given the option."

Since then, Cantwell has argued extending the tax deduction is not only an issue of fairness, but one that impacts business in Washington and especially large-goods sellers like auto dealers. Extending the deduction permanently would stimulate economic growth in Washington by removing doubt from shoppers' minds, she said.

"We get right up to that last six or seven months, and people are always asking, is that going to stay? Am I going to be able to deduct that?" Cantwell said.

**Deduction spurred buying**

Keith Schmidt is a principal at the accounting firm McDermid, Mikkelsen and Secrest in Spokane.

The itemized deduction allows taxpayers to opt out of what he called a "very conservative" estimated deduction offered by the IRS as an alternative to keeping receipts, he said.

The deduction spurred large-item purchases in the state immediately after its reintroduction, Schmidt said. Credits for cars, boats, recreational vehicles and building supplies remain on the
books as items taxpayers can claim on top of standard deductions outlined by the IRS.

Sales figures along the borders of Oregon and Idaho indicate shoppers are keenly aware of tax discrepancies that would be sharpened if the sales tax deduction expired. A 2010 study published in the Journal of Contemporary Economic Policy found border counties lost $21 million annually in sales to Oregon, which has no state or local sales taxes.

**Permanent break unlikely**

Gorton and Rueben, of the Urban Institute, are skeptical a long-term deal will get done without comprehensive changes to the tax code.

The dominance of revenue-neutral spending plans in Washington will likely spoil efforts to extend the break beyond a year or two, Rueben said. Republicans in the House and Senate have voiced opposition to recent spending bills that don’t incorporate dollar-for-dollar cuts.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated in January 2012 that extending the deduction through 2013, the current sunset date, would cost the federal government $1.4 billion in lost tax revenue. Through 2022, that figure grows to $18.1 billion.

Rueben said the more likely scenario is the loss of both sales and income tax deductions, as Reagan envisioned.

"At some point, we’ll have conversations about more fundamental tax reform," Rueben said. "And I’m guessing it will either survive or die with the income tax deduction."

Kip HK, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.
February 13, 2013 in City

Bill targets non-Indian crimes

Tribes could prosecute domestic violence suspects

Ko Hill Correspondent

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Senate on Tuesday reauthorized a federal law channeling resources to female victims of domestic violence, including those on Native American tribal lands.

It is now up to the GOP-led House of Representatives, where GOP leaders have been less than enthusiastic about giving tribes the authority to prosecute non-Indian crime suspects. It could be one of several sticking points that continue to delay President Barack Obama’s signature on the law’s renewal.

Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, introduced the bill with Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt.

Washington Sen. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell both voiced strong support of the bill, which was originally passed in 1994 to stiffen penalties for domestic assaults and provide federal assistance in prosecuting cases for underserved communities.

Cantwell, who chairs the Indian Affairs Committee, said Indian women are raped and assaulted at 2.5 times the national rate, but less than 50 percent of domestic violence cases on reservations, often far from federal courts, are prosecuted. "This is about the life and death of women who need a better system to help prosecute those who are committing serious crimes against them.

Supporters of the bill say a 1978 Supreme Court decision that denies Indian tribes the power to try non-Indian citizens makes an exception for proceedings that are acceptable to Congress. The National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women says the provision is tailored to make sure that all rights guaranteed under the Constitution are given to non-Native American defendants.

The Indian court issue is expected to be a hurdle as lawmakers try to reconcile the Senate bill with the eventual House bill. Two House Republicans – Reps. Tom Cole of Oklahoma, who is of Native American heritage, and Darrell Issa of California – have been pushing a compromise that would give defendants the right to request that their trial be moved to a federal court.

Cantwell said the Senate could not afford to drag its feet on the issue, which has become an “epidemic” on tribal lands where criminals have a safe haven from federal prosecutors.

“This isn’t about politics,” Cantwell said on the Senate floor Monday. “This is about the life and death of women who need a better system.”

According to the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, there have been 41 deaths attributed to domestic violence on tribal lands in this state since 1997. Non-Indian
The original bill attracted the support of Drago, Murray and Gentzil, but not Idaho Republican Sen. James Murny, who said the law would overstep the reach of federal government into local affairs.

The Associated Press contributed to this report. Kip Miller, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C. Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.

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www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/feb/13/bill-targets-non-indian-crimes/
First, public censure to the Washington, D.C. branch of the Billy Goat Tavern. My hankering (and those of my roommates) for a Cheezborger Cheezborger was denied last night when, upon walking across the Capitol grounds to the D.C. establishment further north on New Jersey Avenue from our humble abode, we were informed the entire bar was closed for a private party. Thanks for the announcement. And for squashing my carnivore dreams.

Otherwise, it’s been a quiet weekend in the district, as it normally is. I want to give huge props to Capitol Hill Books, an unassuming townhouse near Eastern Market packed wall-to-wall, literally, with books. I walked in, intending to find a tome for the train rides, and left with two novels and Erik Larson’s riveting Devil in the White City. Makes you wonder what’s going on beneath your very nose in some of the nation’s largest urban centers. And significantly lose your appetite.

This week, the hot topic will likely be President Barack Obama’s State of the Union address, and whether the commander-in-chief continues to adhere to the no-nonsense persona he’s adopted in the aftermath of November’s election. He’ll certainly have a full slate of legislation to address, including the looming battle over sequestration, the gun control proposals he laid out last month and immigration reform that appears DOA in the Senate, without at least some concessions. The International Business Times is reporting there will be four economic growth pillars to Obama’s speech: manufacturing, education, infrastructure and renewable energy. It will be Obama’s fifth State of the Union speech, and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio will handle the bilingual GOP response.

The Senate seems poised to push through a Violence Against Women Act reauthorization on Monday that will retain key features of the bill (i.e. protection for LGBT and migrant communities) that proved stumbling blocks in the GOP-led House last year. The Act expired in 2011, but funding remains in place for its many programs.

The House will discuss H.R. 273, a bill designed to block pay increases for federal employees as the chamber continues championing ways to reduce spending in light of the growing federal deficit. House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer, D-Md., cried foul Thursday, saying the pay freeze affects federal employees who live in his state especially by refusing the cost-of-living increase private sector workers enjoy. It will likely provoke a lively discussion from the Virginia and Maryland delegations.

Oh, and the Parliament Funkadelic will be bringing their own style of rhythm and democracy to the 9:30 Club here in D.C. tomorrow. So I leave you with a little mood music. Stay funky.
February 13, 2013 in City

Region’s lawmakers split on speech

Kip Hill Correspondent

WASHINGTON - The Idaho Northwest congressional delegation was both impressed and riled by President Barack Obama's fourth State of the Union address Tuesday night.

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., said she was pleased by the president's focus on economic policy and his focus on investing in programs to create manufacturing jobs, which are important to Washington state workers.

"You can’t say competitive if you shortchange those programs," Cantwell said.

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., applauded the president’s middle-class focus in his remarks on the economy and his emphasis on job training to make the country’s economy competitive.

"Every economic sector in our state is looking for education and training," Murray said.

But Idaho Sens. James Risch and Mike Crapo bridled at Obama’s calls for tax reform. Risch said Obama’s claim that his programs would not increase the deficit by "a single dime" was unrealistic.

"It was a rah-rah speech," Risch said. "It wasn't a legitimate policy speech."

Crapo said the measures introduced by Obama would end up hurting the economy.

"Excessive taxing and our massive debt are weakening economic growth today, resulting in fewer job openings, smaller paychecks and more dependence on the federal government," Crapo said.

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers echoed the call for addressing deficit reduction. She said she agreed with the president's call for improved energy independence for job creation.

"I hope that that is an arena where we can continue to move forward," McMorris Rodgers said. "I believe that the Keystone project is an important part of that for North American independence, as well as all of the other energy sources."

Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, has gained prominence as a potential source of compromise in the House on immigration reform, which Obama touted in his speech. Labrador said he’s hopeful a bipartisan deal will get done.

"What I'm concerned about is I think the president and some Democrats want a political victory and not a policy victory," Labrador said.

Labrador said he thought Republicans had "moved to the center on this issue, and it's time for the president and his party to move in our direction."

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www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/Feb/13/regions-lawmakers-split-on-speech/
Spin Control

Murray announces Senate budget hearings

Posted by Mip hill
Feb. 5, 2011 11:18 a.m. 3 comments

WASHINGTON — The first official steps toward passing a Senate budget will be taken next week. Budget Committee Chairman Patty Murray said today.

The Democratic senator from Washington announced two sessions scheduled for Feb. 12 and 13 Murray has vowed, amid rebukes from House Republicans about the four-year absence of a Senate spending plan, to pass a budget resolution this spring. The legal deadline to bring a resolution to the Senate floor for approval is April 1.

The 22-member committee, which also includes Idaho Republican Sen. Mike Crapo, will first hear from Congressional Budget Office Director Douglas Elmendorf. Elmendorf will answer questions about the bipartisan group’s Budget and Economic Outlook report released Tuesday.

That report projected a shrinking deficit in 2013, falling to around $816 billion from more than $1 trillion in 2012. That would make 2013’s deficit near 5 percent of GDP, its lowest level since President Barack Obama entered office. However, the report predicts rising deficits over the next decade due to “the pressures of an aging population, rising health care costs, an expansion of federal subsidies for health insurance, and growing interest payments on federal debt.”

In response to the report’s findings, Murray reaffirmed her commitment to protect certain spending programs and explore revenue-increasing measures.

“We need to continue working to cut spending responsibly, protect and strengthen programs like Medicare, and raise revenue by closing tax loopholes that the wealthiest Americans and biggest corporations take advantage of,” Murray said in a statement.

On Feb. 11, the committee is expected to hear from representatives of the public testifying on how federal budget decisions affect them. Murray has stressed her commitment to involving public input in the resolution drafting process, which has included soliciting their suggestions on the committee’s website through a program called “MyBudget.”

Senators are expected to listen to a legislative retreat that is expected to last through Wednesday. Budget issues will likely be on the table among a number of policy issues that will likely be on the table among a number of policy issues, including deep spending cuts to reduce and discretionary programs set to kick in next month.

Murray announced the hearings via Twitter with the comment: “Looking fwd
Murray announces Senate budget hearings - Spin Control - Spokesman.com - Feb. 5, 2013

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WASHINGTON – As the U.S. Senate gets set to deliver a promised budget, the Idaho delegation last week showed it would fight any measure that fails to significantly cut spending.

Sens. Jim Risch and Mike Crapo voted against both the debt ceiling suspension and the $50 billion relief package for states affected by Hurricane Sandy. The two Republicans favored amendments that would have offset the spending increases through discretionary spending cuts, which were ultimately defeated.

“Budget agreements in the last Congress set the precedent that any increase in the debt ceiling should be equally matched with spending cuts,” the senators said in a joint statement released after the debt limit suspension was passed.

The debt ceiling bill made its way to the Senate floor after House Republicans pushed the measure through two weeks ago. It abolishes the more than $14 trillion debt limit of the federal government through May 13 and stipulates that members of Congress will have their pay withheld until they pass a budget resolution.

U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, a Seattle-area Democrat serving as the new chair of the Senate’s Budget Committee, has said that will happen this spring. If a budget resolution passes the Senate, it would be the chamber’s first since 2010. But Senate Democrats will have to deal with Republican counterparts. Crapo and Risch among them, clamoring for spending cuts to balance the budget.

“[T]he problem is simply that the government spends too much and has so far refused to enact meaningful policies that will bring common sense back to our federal budgeting process,” Crapo said Monday in a statement.

For her part, Murray has vowed to protect spending programs like Medicare and Pell grants in her budget proposal. Senate Democratic leadership has also signaled tax rate increases would likely be part of their deal.

While an amendment to the Sandy deal proved unpopular, it garnered a few Democratic votes. The amendment, pushed by Republican Sen. Rob Portman of Ohio, called for a decade-long assurance that federal debt limit increases would be matched by spending cuts totaling $3 trillion.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus said Portman’s cuts would cause “inseparable harm.”

“The method suggested by the Senator from Ohio is a step backward,” Baucus said. The amendment failed on a 52-48 vote.

Crapo serves alongside Murray on the Budget Committee. No committee hearings have been scheduled, and the body has a legal deadline of April 1 to bring a resolution to the floor.
I stood in the lobby of the Senate building this morning, on my way up to the press gallery. This was my first day actually working out of the capitol, and my knees were knockin’. A woman came up to me, obviously perplexed, and asked one question that completely disarmed me:

“Where’s the subway to the Senate building?”

Now, let’s overlook the “there is no spoon” element of this moment. A woman is asking me where the subway is to the building we’re standing in at that very moment. Normally, if someone asked me a question like that, my tongue would roll back in my throat and I’d look for an adult to calm me down. Today, though, it was just the wake-up moment I needed.

It’s easy to get star-struck here. Waiting for an interview after Kerry’s confirmation in the Senate, I found myself rubbing elbows with John McCain, Al Franken, Rand Paul and the newly minted Secretary of State himself. (As an aside, the practice of loitering near the elevators for an interview is an experience every journalist should have. It’s like democracy, the DMV and the red carpet all rolled into one.)

Look, journalism is never easy. Anyone that suggests otherwise is either fooling themselves or uncommitted to the craft and professionalism involved in the process of informing the public. That doesn’t matter if you’re reporting on the garage sale in your neighborhood or a foreign policy fiasco. It’s made especially tougher when the people you’re covering wield the political and social capital one must attain to become a senator or congress person in the first place.

So it’s nice, once in a while, when you stand agape before that massive machine that is the federal government, to be asked a question you know the answer to. Even if the question itself is based on a mind-dizzying premise.
January 28, 2013 in City, Nation/World

Murray unveils online budget tool as GOP digs in

Kip HKR Spokesman-Review correspondent

WASHINGTON — It didn’t take long for U.S. Sen. Patty Murray to get comfortable in her new cyberspace digs.

A few days after officially assuming the role of Budget Committee chairwoman, the senior senator from Washington unveiled on Monday a new way for Internet users to get involved in the budget discussion.

The digital solicitation comes as Republican leadership continues chiding the Democrat-led Senate for failing to pass a budget and airing its staunch opposition to tax hikes. House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, for example, said Sunday that inaction from Senate Democrats has led his party to believe deep, automatic spending cuts known as sequestration will occur.

Murray is taking the pressure in stride, rolling out an online destination for taxpayers to share their thoughts on the budget process.

“The federal budget is where we lay out our values, our priorities, and our vision for what our government should look like now and in the future,” Murray said in a statement announcing the online MyBudget tool. “So I believe that it is absolutely critical that the ideas and perspectives of families across America are heard loud and clear in a budget process that belongs to them, but is too often limited to politicians and bureaucrats.”

The Senate Budget Committee is responsible for bringing a budget resolution to the floor for a vote. That hasn’t happened since April 2011, which prompted a move by House Republicans last week to call for withholding pay from members of Congress until they’ve come up with a spending plan.

For her part, Murray joined several prominent Democrats in promising a budget would pass the Senate this spring. Murray said the MyBudget initiative is a way of incorporating the priorities and ideas of all Americans into that process.

MyBudget, available through The Spokesman-Review’s website at budget.spg民主, is set up like an online survey. Users must submit their name, city, state and email address to weigh in on questions concerning budget priorities, ideas for spending cuts and how federal spending impacts their lives. In her announcement, Murray said she’d eventually like to see the platform work as a social media hub, allowing users to share their ideas and organize through the service.

Failure to come up with a viable spending plan looms large over Washington with sequestration looming. If no alternative is agreed to, automatic spending cuts totaling $1.2 trillion over the next 10 years will begin in March, affecting defense and discretionary spending.

Ryan used weekend appearances on TV news programs to urge movement from the Senate.
“This isn’t a Republican or a Democrat thing,” Ryan told NBC’s David Gregory. “It’s a math thing, and we have to get serious with this problem if we want to save people from the problems that inevitably would result from a debt crisis.”

Ryan reiterated Republicans’ position that further revenue increases through tax hikes would not be a part of the House’s budget plan. He said that issue had been settled with this month’s fiscal cliff deal.

House Speaker John Boehner has said the Republican budget will balance the budget in 10 years. Without tax increases, that plan will likely include deeper cuts to federal spending programs such as Medicare and Pell grants than the budget Ryan drafted last year.

MyBudget will allow a public largely skeptical of Ryan’s budget decisions to offer concrete proposals to Senate committee members. His Medicare voucher proposal, in particular, did not sit well with many Americans. According to an August poll by the Pew Research Center, 49 percent of respondents opposed the plan to reform Medicare by offering future credit for enrollees to purchase private insurance, while 34 percent backed it.

Kip Hill, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.

Get stories like this in a free daily email
January 24, 2013 in City

Murray: Senate will pass budget

Kb HB Correspondent

Tags: Cathy McMorris Rodgers federal budget Medicare Patty Murray u.s. congress u.s. senate

WASHINGTON – Count Washington Sen. Patty Murray among those confident the U.S. Senate will pass a budget this spring.

The new Budget Committee chairwoman said Wednesday it’s time for her colleagues “to get to work,” acknowledging that the upper chamber has failed to approve a spending plan since 2010, but chastising Republican members of the GOP-controlled House for what she considers years of disruptive tactics.

“Republicans have time and again pulled budget negotiations out of the Budget Committee in ways that rattled the markets, hurt the economy, and increased uncertainty,” Murray said in prepared remarks. Murray, a Democrat from Seattle, serves on the congressional/budget “supercommittee” that convened in 2011 to address the growing deficit. That group ultimately failed to produce a bipartisan plan.

Murray’s comments came in the hours before the House approved a plan suspending the national debt ceiling through May 16 and putting pocketbook pressure on the Senate by withholding congressional paychecks until a budget resolution is passed. Helping lead the no-budget-no-pay charge is U.S. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, a Spokane Republican serving as House GOP Conference chairwoman.

Several top Senate Democrats have signaled their agreement with the plan, seeing it as a sign House Republicans have come to their senses after threatening default.

“We’re going to do a budget this year, and it’s going to have revenues in it, and our Republican colleagues better get used to that fact,” Schumer said.

Murray echoed Schumer on Wednesday, saying Democrats would fight proposed cuts to programs such as Medicare in the House’s budget plan authored by Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis.

“We know that when our priorities are laid out next to Republicans’, the public stands with us,” Murray said in her statement.

The Pew Research Center tracks public opinion on priorities for federal spending reductions. Last summer, it’s most recent poll numbers, Pew reported widespread unease regarding federal spending reductions. Just 12 percent of Americans reported a desire to cut federal spending on Medicare, compared with 40 percent who said benefits should increase. On college financial aid, 16 percent said spending should be cut, while 44 percent said the government wasn’t spending enough.

www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/jan/24/murray-senate-will-pass-budget/
Ryan, who chairs the House Budget Committee, presented a spending plan for 2013 that featured cuts to Medicare and Pell Grant programs.

Ranking Republican Budget Committee member Zeno Jeff Sessions of Alabama lauded his House counterparts for pushing the so-called "No Budget, No Pay" act and said the time is right for addressing irresponsible government spending.

"Our current path — that of Greece — is one of chronically high debt, unemployment, poverty and dependency," Sessions said.

In a letter to Murray, Sessions expressed his colleagues' willingness to work with Democrats in passing a budget and called for a resolution to be on the Senate floor for debate by mid-March.

Murray signaled Wednesday that Democrats would not be interested in deals that continue to delay tough budget decisions.

"Senate Democrats plan to move on a budget resolution regardless of whether the House rolls this issue into their short-term bill to increase the debt limit," Murray said. "The House did just that when it passed a three-month suspension of the debt ceiling Wednesday afternoon.

No Senate Budget Committee hearings had been scheduled as of Wednesday.

Kip Hill is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.

Get stories like this in a free daily email
It's a world of abstractions.

I walked by one of the seemingly endless massive marble buildings downtown this evening, bundled into overcoats like I'd never experienced a Midwest winter before. I have. I just think if I'm going to be this cold, I should be knee-deep in snow, too.

The etching said “The Department of Justice.” Now, I'm well aware that there's a department for such a thing and its importance in the functioning of our massive federal government. We can argue about the necessity of such things or the philosophical hubris of human beings self-affirming their ability to house branching philosophical constructs under one roof at a later date. Or not. Typing that sentence made my irises hurt.

The point is, I'm living in a city — as a writer, trying to explain things in plain terms — that not only revels in abstraction, but celebrates it. Take today's debt ceiling vote. In legislative language (the kind passive-haters would flagellate themselves should they commit to paper), House Republicans voted to keep enabling the federal government to borrow money and provide its services for three extra months.

My goal as a writer should be to show you what that means in concrete terms. In Advanced Reporting, we talked about the ladder of abstraction. I've discovered, in just a few weeks here in the nation's capital, there's a vacuum sucking all thought toward the upper rung of abstraction.

Great writing, great thinking, great legislation — it all comes from taking a deep breath and looking down a rung or two. It's not simple, or natural, or easy. But it's rewarded.

Like when a journalist stops to think about a simple patch on a uniform.
Ryan, who chairs the House Budget Committee, presented a spending plan for 2013 that featured cuts to Medicare and Pell Grant programs.

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In a letter to Murray, Sessions expressed his colleagues’ willingness to work with Democrats in passing a budget and called for a resolution to be on the Senate floor for debate by mid-March.

Murray signaled Wednesday that Democrats would not be interested in deals that continue to delay tough budget decisions.

“Senate Democrats plan to move on a budget resolution regardless of whether the House rolls this issue into their short-term bill to increase the debt limit,” Murray said. The House did just that when it passed a three-month suspension of the debt ceiling Wednesday afternoon.

No Senate Budget Committee hearings had been scheduled as of Wednesday.

Kyp Hill is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.

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Huckleberries Online
Risch Grills Clinton Re: Benghazi

Posted by DPO
Jan 23, 2013 2:30 p.m. · 11 comments

Italo Sen. James Risch used his time with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to confirm statements she made soon after the American consulate in Libya was attacked and four U.S. officials were killed in September. Clinton testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday morning that she “told the American people that ‘heavily armed militants assaulted our compound’ and vowed to bring them to justice.” And I stood with President Obama as he spoke of ‘an act of terror.’” That account conflicts with early reports of the attacks, characterized by U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice as a series of spontaneous attacks that rook in protest to an American-made video that prompted outrage among many Muslimonnaudiences. Risch asked whether Clinton was involved in selecting Rice to comment on the attacks in the American media, noting that I came at a “politically charged time.”

Kip Hill, SR Washington correspondent. More here. (AP photo)

Thoughts?
Inaugural a life’s goal for some

Spokane students, residents attend D.C. ceremony

The Central Valley High School marching band and color guard head down Pennsylvania Avenue on route to the White House on Monday.

WASHINGTON — Seamus Davis felt the Orange crush trying to catch a glimpse of President Barack Obama on Monday.

His grandparents gave him their airline miles, and Washington State Democrat Vice Chair Valerie Rangel gave him a place to stay. The Obama volunteer received tickets to the event from an article source: Republican Rep. Cathy McMorris-Rodgers.

But when Davis stepped into line at 9:45 a.m. his luck seemed to run out.

“They weren’t letting anyone in,” the 22-year-old Spokane resident said.

The delays at the Orange Gate at First and D streets quickly spread through social media. Twitter users, some with the unfortunate color-coded ticket in hand, tweeted updates using the hashtag “OrangeCrush.”

Davis didn’t have a smartphone, and cell phone usage caused some standoffs. Yet he managed to find his way to the lawn just as the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir performed “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” The security barge cost him a view of the stage, but he watched Obama take the oath of office for his second term on massive screens flanking the National Mall.

Spokane residents who made the more than 2,000-mile trek to the nation’s capital for the event faced huge crowds, heightened security and temperatures setting back to a seasonably brisk level after a balmy weekend. Witnessing the historic moment and representing the Inland Northwest made it all worth it, they said.

Legislative District 6 Democratic Chairwoman Mary Vasink stood Monday on the Capitol’s lawn with her husband, Spokane lawyer Tom McGarry. The two rose at 4 a.m. to make their way to the ceremony and had better luck with the crowds than Davis.

“We got to see it all,” Vasink said. “We had a clear view of the president.”

Vasink lost Vaasink Washington, D.C., in the late 1980s. She carries the memory of her father, an Obama supporter who died in 2011. Alfred Vaasink served as a B-17 gunner during World War II and was unable to make the trip on Obama’s first inauguration day.

“I know he’s here in spirit,” Mary Vaasink said.

About a quarter mile away, near the Capitol’s reflecting pool, 17 seventh- and eighth-graders from St. George’s School took in the ceremony, which featured musical performances from James

www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/jan/22/inaugural-a-lifes-goal-for-some/
Taylor, Beyonce and Kelly Clarkson.

Led by history teacher Steve Gavin, the group toured Williamsburg, Va., on Friday and spent the weekend taking in sights near the capital.

As the temperature fell Sunday night, the group visited the Franklin Delano Roosevelt monument. They paused to pose with statues commemorating the 32nd president’s four terms as parents snapped pictures.

A visit to George Washington’s home on Mount Vernon couldn’t shake the students’ anticipation of Monday’s ceremony.

“It’s a really long-standing thing, so I’ll just be cool to see,” seventh-grader Hailey Poulatine said. “Because you don’t really get that chance more than once in a lifetime, do you?”

It certainly seemed that way for Davis, whose journey to the inauguration began at an early age. As an elementary school student, he would watch presidential speeches and inaugurations and long to be in the crowd. In the past year, he’s volunteered for the Obama campaign, served as a delegate to the Democratic Party’s national convention in Charlotte, N.C., and wrote both Washington senators and McMorris Rodgers in hopes of nabbing a ticket.

“It’s been a crazy nine months for me,” Davis said.

Clouds rolled in Monday morning, and a stiff southerly wind kept the wind chill factor in the 30s throughout much of the day. The sun peeked out in the afternoon, and the day ended much warmer than Obama’s first inauguration, when wind chills dwelled in the teens.

As the president ended his remarks to a crowd on the West Front of the U.S. Capitol, members of the Central Valley High School marching band and color guard departed to tune up for their performance in the inaugural parade. The decorated performers joined members of the United States Navy and a float dedicated to the memory of Martin Luther King Jr.

Spokane native Jemima Wynn rode in the parade as a member of the Culver Girls Academy Equestriennes. The riding group, based in northern Indiana, has accompanied the school’s Military Academy Black Horse Troop in seven inaugural ceremonies.

The scope of Monday’s celebration will stick with Wissink and Davis for a long time. Wissink said she wouldn’t forget “the magic of watching the president speak to almost a million people."

Davis’ obstructed view didn’t dampen his spirits.

“The fact that I was there, that was enough.”

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January 20, 2013

Band soaking up D.C. experience

Ritual at Arlington impresses CV musicians

KB HILL Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Henry Simbol had one emphatic word following the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

“Incredible,” the Central Valley High School sophomore gasped.

The hourly ritual at Arlington National Cemetery, a sprawling memorial to the nation’s fallen service members across the Potomac River from the National Mall, became a first-in-a-lifetime experience for many members of Central Valley’s marching band.

The 130-student group arrived on four flights Thursday in Baltimore ahead of a performance in the presidential inaugural parade Monday.

Friday morning, bumbled in overcoats and powder-blue letter jackets, the students witnessed the highly-ritualized ceremony firsthand. Simbol said he experience bowled him over.

“The discipline and integrity of the guard is amazing,” said Simbol, who has relatives who have served in the military.

Junior flute players Aisla Graham, Morgan Baxter and Melissa Morgan were surprised to learn the origins of the cemetery. They hadn’t heard the story of the Union army seizing Robert E. Lee’s mansion during the Civil War and converting it into hallowed ground.

Later, students loaded onto a feel of charter buses to head into Washington, D.C., for lunch, a U.S. Capitol tour and a meeting with Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers.

“I’m very, very proud of you,” McMorris Rodgers told members of the band as they gathered around her and band director Eric Parker in the Caucus Room of the Cannon Office Building on Capitol Hill. Each section of the band, from woodwinds to brass, posed for photos with the congresswoman.

The group spent Friday night dining at the Old Post Office Pavilion along their parade route and visiting the international Spy Museum downtown, a destination many students said would be the highlight of the trip.

www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/jan/20/band-soaking-up-dc-experience/
Focus may be difficult for the star-studded students, whose cameras constantly click on hours. But the group also performed Saturday in a competition in Baltimore, earning a silver rating.

Chaparral's Bill DeRie, whose daughter elite is a sophomore trumpet player, is on his first trip with Central Valley's band. He's been impressed with their behavior and awareness of the experience.

"It's amazing to me how much knowledge these kids bring," DeRie said.

Preparations are under way throughout the district for both the inaugural address and parade set to take place Monday. Grandstands several stories tall line portions of the Mall, and banners congratulating President Barack Obama grace several buildings along the main parade route.

Andrew Peltonen, a sophomore saxophone player, said there were strict rules the band must follow, such as the four-step distance band members must maintain between each other.

But Henry Jiao, a freshman clarinet player, had some more practical concerns.

"All of us are probably going to freeze," Jiao said, laughing.

Monday's forecasts call for afternoon temperatures in the 30s and partly cloudy skies. It could be a repeat of 2008's cold inauguration, in which temperatures struggled to top 30 degrees.

Those concerns weren't on Simboli's mind Friday.

"We're honored to be presenting in front of the president," Simboli said.

Kip Hill, a student at the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.

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49 comments

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trace • artbunday • 2 months ago

Agreed. These first several comments (from Northriner, scootersonm, etc., down to Jannin) are showing up on many articles regardless of the topic.

www.spokesman.com/story/2013/jan/20/band-soaking-up-dc-experience/
January 18, 2013 in City

**Competition strong in bid to house tankers**

Lawmakers, local leaders ready to back Fairchild

Kb Hb Correspondent

### Comparing bases

**Runway lengths**

- Fairchild: 13,869 feet (2.6 miles)
- McConnel: 2 runways, each 12,000 feet
- Altus: 13,440 and 9,000 feet
- Grand Forks: 12,351 feet

**Active-duty personnel**

- Fairchild: 4,888
- McConnel: 5,007
- Altus: 1,700
- Grand Forks: 1,204

WASHINGTON — Making it to the short list was just the first step.

Now, the race to land the first squadron of AmeriFirst Air Force Base is a high-stake between backers of Fairchild Air Force Base and groups of communities in the other states.

The four finalists:

- Fairchild
- McConnel
- Altus
- Grand Forks

"We’re fully prepared to make the case for Fairchild, chief executive officer of Greater Spokane Inc. Incorporated, a business development group that made sure five final bids are based in Spokane and West Plains."
• McConnell. 22nd Air Refueling Wing
• Altus: 97th Air Mobility Wing
• Grand Forks: 319th Air Base Wing

...together representatives at the local, state and national levels. Hadley said he was thrilled with the recent announcement and that Fairchild boasts "a full package" of infrastructure, strategic location and community support that make it desirable as the home base for the Washington-produced aircraft.

But Spokane isn’t the only community with its eyes on the 90-ton prize.

Kansas officials postured last week to make the case for McConnell. Originally a public airstrip, McConnell was converted during the 1950s and named after a trio of brothers who were pilots in World War II. The base began housing KC-135 tankers in 1971.

Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., lauded McConnell’s selection as a finalist for the new planes and called it "the premiere ‘super tanker’ base in the nation." The Wichita installation serves as home base for 63 aircraft.

Moran serves on the Senate’s Appropriations and Veterans Affairs committees. Rep. Mike Pompeo, of Wichita, is a decorated graduate of West Point and has roots in the airplane manufacturing industry.

Wichita formed a "Tanker Task Force" to promote McConnell, similar to the Fairchild First project. Wayne Roberts chairs that task force and said McConnell’s amenities make it an ideal location for either the operating base or training unit distinction.

"We’re going after both," Roberts said.

Wichita was initially floated as a site where Boeing might construct the KC-46A. In December 2011, the company announced production would occur exclusively in Everett while it studied whether to close sprawling defense production facilities in Kansas. The company decided early last year to close the division and last week said the property would be on the market by month’s end.

Roberts said the interest in housing the tankers was unrelated to Boeing ending its production in Wichita.

The Altus air base lies just a few miles northeast of downtown in the Oklahoma city of nearly 20,000. Its primary mission is training airfield and aerial refueling crews, and it houses 40 aircraft, according to base officials.

Joe Leverett, an Altus physician who chairs the city’s Military Affairs Committee, said he was “pleasantly surprised” by the base’s selection as a finalist for operations. Now flying the KC-135 and C-17, Altus once flew four types of aircraft and has ramp and air space ideal for the new tankers, Leverett said.

But based on the criteria, Fairchild and McConnell may be better fits as a base of operations, he said.

“We don’t want to get our hopes up,” Leverett said. “But we’d love to take on that mission as well.”

Leading the charge for Altus in Washington will likely be Republican Sen. James Inhofe, a member of the Senate’s Standing Committee on Armed Services and a former Army pilot. He said last week the KC-46A “would be a great fit with the existing programs at Altus.”


Its runways were last repaired eight years ago. With those repairs under way, some of its flight operations went through Fairchild. KC-135s last took off from Grand Forks in December 2010, ending a run of the aircraft at the base that began in 1960. Grand Forks tankers were transferred to McConnell.

www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/jan/18/competition-strong-in-bid-to-house-tankers/?fb_action_id=2295377426152&fb_action_type=sog.recommends&fb_sear...
Republican Sen. John Hoeven, the senior senator from North Dakota, said in prepared remarks last week that the delegation of himself and two freshman lawmakers, Sen. Heidi Heitkamp and Rep. Kevin Cramer, had been doing “all we can to push for Grand Forks’ selection as one of the active duty bases.” Hoeven serves on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction.

The Air Force will conduct inspections this spring as lawmakers ponder automatic defense spending cuts set to kick in March 1. Congress voted last year to suspend base closures or consolidation, but Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said in August such moves are inevitable.

Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek said the finalists were selected from an initial field of 54 based on their desirability as homes for the new tankers, not consideration of the looming cuts known as “sequestration.”

“The Air Force does not know if or how sequestration will affect KC-46A procurement or basing,” Stefanek said.

The last round of base closures, begun in 2005, led to realignment for the Grand Forks base. For the last two years, the base has been flying unmanned aircraft.

The Air Force will whittle the list to a preferred location this spring. A final decision is expected in spring 2014, and the tankers are set to begin arriving in 2017.

Kip WN, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.
I'm reminded, this morning, of a clip from Lewis Black's hilarious "White Album" (before the comic went off the deep end, for him — his last few albums have been lacking in that whole "laugh out loud" category) in which he describes America's reaction to Bill Clinton's nationally televised apology for hooking up with a White House staffer.

"I believe the next few words out of everyone's mouth were, what the @$#%?!” Black yelled, in his usual manner, to laughs and applause from the audience.

That is, collectively, where the United States was last night in learning from Deadspin about the "hoax" of Manti Te'o's non-existent girlfriend. You'll notice I put “hoax” in quotation marks here, because that cynicism gene that all 21st century human beings have emblazoned on their brain stem won't allow me to type the sentence without them. My fist physically flies from the keyboard and punches me in the eye as a reflex if the word comes out otherwise.

So here's were at in this whole thing on Wednesday morning: a ton of finger-pointing, a mea culpa likely to ESPN's Jeremy Schaap, and sports media pundits laboring over the same few talking points, as they're want to do: how does this impact the Notre Dame star's draft status? How did this impact his performance in the Fighting Irish's dismal loss to the Alabama Crimson Tide in the BCS title game? And what does Notre Dame's rallying around perhaps their most visible star tell us about the integrity of the school?

There are a few out there, in the appropriate places (The Atlantic, Romenesko and elsewhere) questioning how this story made it past so many decorated sportswriters and onto the many illuminated screens of our daily lives without so much as a single moment to pause and hold the storybook up to the grim light of reality. We'll be talking about those things a lot longer than Te'o's career in the NFL, assuming he'll have one. For now, I'm boiling the multitude of topics blown open by this Pandora's box of treachery to a few simple lessons in all this:

1. Narrative writing demands verification

Part of the reason Te'o's story got so much play was because it lent itself to narrative storytelling techniques. The details about his girlfriend's heart fluttering when he spoke to her over the phone, their parting words being confessions of love and a chance encounter at a football game several years ago despite being a country apart all lend themselves wonderfully to that star-crossed, impassioned lover narrative that Shakespeare eloquently laid out for us 400 years ago.

Eric Hansen, of the South Bend Tribune, may have been the most indulgent offender in trying to meld story and news into one emotional narrative. He wrote in October:
“Lennay Kekua was a Stanford student and Cardinal football fan when the two exchanged glances, handshakes and phone numbers that fateful weekend three seasons ago.”

A meeting we now know from the Deadspin piece never occurred. Hansen revealed last night that his source for this information was Te’o himself.

In a world where we’re all struggling to be heard, so-called “New Journalism” or “narrative non-fiction” has become a way of yelling over the din, calling to readers and saying, “My stuff is more palatable!” It’s also what got Fareed Zakaria in trouble last summer, though. As we move forward with this type of writing, it’s incredibly important to look under the hood and verify with more than one source details of this magnitude.

If for no other reason, they could provide an interesting wrinkle to the story. What if Hansen had asked the girlfriend (had she existed) what she remembered of their first encounter? She may have given him a quote about the first thing she noticed about Te’o, or how there were butterflies in her stomach when they talked. Boom. Narrative gold.

2. Always take a moment and think about impact.

God forbid Te’o was involved in this elaborate scheme. But in political reporting, before I place a representative’s quote in a story or cite a fact they’ve handed me, I think about what purpose it’s not only serving in the narrative I’m constructing, but also the ends that want to be met by a source.

I’m not sure how it works in sports reporting. Perhaps a soundbite is a soundbite is a soundbite. I hope we’ve moved past that in journalism, though I’ll admit gathering strings of reactions from lawmakers yesterday to Obama’s gun proposals felt a lot like doing just that. Sometimes it’s necessary. But when bigger cogs come into play — like, say, the competition for a national honor that bestows tremendous prestige and potential financial benefit — we’ve got to be skeptical listeners.

Just because a story comports with conventional wisdom, and seems to have been vetted by other news organizations, does not mean we should throw out the traditional tools of fact-checking and contextualizing stories for our audience.

3. Man, does the media have some power

You could make the argument that the Te’o story has elements that all Americans would find fascinating: love, deceit, sports, social upheaval, a fall from grace. And you’d probably be right. I passed the Newseum walking into work today, and all had stories above the fold on Obama’s gun control proposals. If you’d have asked me yesterday morning what the big story was going to be in the afternoon, I’d have pointed directly at that issue and plopped a big sack of money on the table.

But things can change in the blink of an eye. I read the Deadspin piece on my walk home, and by the time I’d reached my front door it was all over Twitter. People I follow who have no interest in sports were comically placing apostrophes all over Te’o’s last name and hashtagging themselves to ironic death.

Lance Armstrong, the NRA and any celebrity who did something embarrassing yesterday should thank their lucky
Lawmakers react to gun bill

Kp Hill Correspondent

Tags: gun control, guns, Washington legislation

January 17, 2013 in City

Lawmakers react to gun bill

WASHINGTON — Inland Northwest lawmakers gave mixed reviews to President Barack Obama’s gun control proposals unveiled Wednesday.

Washington’s Democratic senators lauded the $500 million package of proposals as the right move at the right time. Republican lawmakers questioned the reach of Obama’s plans and whether they’d have the desired effect on violent crime.

Sen. Patty Murray co-sponsored the original assault weapons ban that Obama recommended be reinstated and bolstered. She also voted in favor of 1994’s Brady Handgun Bill that beefed up criminal background checks on gun buyers.

Murray praised Obama’s proposals for encompassing two sources of gun violence.

“The president has put forward a series of sensible steps that will not only help to keep guns out of the wrong hands and off our streets, but that also address many of the mental health concerns that have led isolated individuals to carry out mass atrocities,” Murray said in a statement.

Sen. Maria Cantwell joined her Washington state colleague in praising the president’s recommendations.

“Senator Cantwell applauds President Obama’s efforts to close gun purchase loopholes and to create new tools for further background checks,” spokeswoman Jared Laphoald said. Cantwell also wants to see a more detailed response to the challenges presented by mental illness and a comprehensive approach to dealing with school safety, he said.

Both Democratic lawmakers admitted gun control would be a difficult political issue but said the time was right for addressing the problem.

House Republican Caucus Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers said a multitiered approach to curbing gun violence should be explored and that House committees would be reviewing the president’s recommendations.

“We should focus on every opportunity to make our schools and families safer to prevent tragedies like Newtown,” said McMorris Rodgers, who represents Eastern Washington.

Other Republican members of the Inland Northwest delegation had sharper words for the president’s proposals.

In remarks Idaho Sen. Mike Crapo called the plan “very disappointing” and chided Obama for his decision to enact many of the policies through executive action, without congressional approval.

“Burdening law-abiding citizens of this country with additional gun restrictions is not the answer to safeguarding the public from further attacks,” Crapo said.

As a member of the U.S. House, Crapo voted against the 1994 assault weapons ban.

Crapo’s colleague, Sen. Jim Risch, agreed that circumventing debate through executive action on gun control was a mistake.

“I am troubled by the continuing efforts of this president to legislate by executive order when his responsibility under the Constitution is to execute laws enacted by the legislative branch,” Risch said in a statement.

Rep. Raul Labrador, whose congressional district includes North Idaho, said a close look was needed at Obama’s proposals to ensure they don’t infringe on Second Amendment rights.

“Despite the shameful use of children today to drive his agenda, I will carefully review the president’s executive actions and his legislative proposals,” Labrador said in a statement.

Rep. Doc Hastings, whose district includes Central Washington, lobbied for a bill to allow loaded guns in national parks that eventually passed Congress with bipartisan support in 2009. At the time, he was ranking member of the House Natural Resources Committee, a group he now chairs.

Hastings echoed the president’s concern about opportunities for mental health care to stop perpetrators of mass shootings, but said tragedies such as Newtown should not be cause to punish law-abiding gun owners.

McMorris Rodgers, Hastings, Labrador, Crapo and Risch have all earned high marks from the National Rifle Association.

The wrangle over gun control enters a Congress preoccupied with debt discussion. Obama on Wednesday called on Americans to urge their lawmakers to bring his recommendations to a vote.

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Spin Control

McMorris Rodgers not backing away from shutdown threat

Posted by Jeff Kilgore
Jan 15, 2013 12:14 p.m. - 0 comments


The House Republican Conference chairwoman disputed any suggestion the GOP was engaged in irresponsible threat by acknowledging its willingness to shut down the government over federal spending policies.

“Instead, she said it’s President Barack Obama’s position that should be seen as troubling.”

“Hello said it would be irresponsible and absurd to shut down.” McMorris Rodgers said in a phone interview, “I would say that’s irresponsible and absurd for the president to want another bailiwick check.”

McMorris Rodgers hinted over the weekend a shutdown might be needed to force Obama to consider cuts to federal programs. She said Tuesday night in Washington wants to see that happen, but “we need to get serious about cutting spending and the president says we don’t have a spending problem.”

The congresswoman said she’d seen the president’s news conference Monday, in which he said he would not permit House Republicans to charge a “shutdown” to raise ceiling in an attempt to address spending cuts.

But McMorris Rodgers, who represents Spokane and much of Eastern Washington, said the time has come to address America’s mounting debt.

“What got us to this point is too much spending by both parties,” McMorris Rodgers said. “But especially in recent years we’ve seen record deficits, and we need to be rolling back Obama’s spending increases.”

The Treasury Department reported a federal deficit of $1.1 trillion in fiscal 2012, the fourth straight year with a deficit higher than $1 trillion. However, the deficit shrunk $207 billion, or roughly 15 percent, from the year prior, thanks in part to higher corporate tax receipts and decreased spending as a share of GDP.

Tags: Barack Obama, Cathy McMorris Rodgers, government shutdown, National Debt

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www.spokesman.com/blogs/spincontrol/2013/01/15/mcmorris-rogers-not-backing-away-shutdown-threat/
Government shutdown may be needed, McMorris Rodgers says

WASHINGTON – In an attempt to convince President Barack Obama to consider spending cuts, House Republicans may shut down the federal government, Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers said.

The House Republican Conference chairwoman told Politico a shutdown is possible "to make sure President Obama understands that we're serious."

House Republicans have brought Obama to the brink before in calling for firm belt-tightening measures that include cuts to entitlement programs. McMorris Rodgers’ comments indicate a readiness to do so again.

But in a news conference Monday morning, the final of his first term, Obama said a government shutdown would be a “mistake” and “profoundly damaging to our economy,” while acknowledging the GOP has the votes in the House to do so.

"I think it's short-sighted," the president said. “But they're elected representatives, and folks put them into those positions, and they're going to have to make a decision on that.”

Should Congress take no action on the debt ceiling, the Congressional Budget Office estimates the federal government will exhaust its credit in mid-February or early March. The House could then choose not to authorize additional funding, forcing government activities to grind to a halt.

Though lawmakers threatened shutdown several times in 2011, Congress eventually agreed to a $1 trillion spending deal that kept the federal government's doors open through all of 2012. The federal government last experienced a shutdown in November.
Government shutdown may be needed, McMorris Rodgers says ... http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/jan/15/government-sh...

1995 that spilled over into the new year.

*Kip Hill*

Get more news and information at Spokesman.com
In the final news conference of his first term in office, President Barack Obama took House Republicans repeatedly to task for threatening to wait to authorize a debt ceiling increase until deficit concerns are addressed.

Obama at times appeared agitated as he said multiple times the issue comes down to one of America paying its bills. Perhaps his most vivid analogy was when he likened the Republicans’ plan to the classic dine and dash maneuver.

“You don’t go out to dinner and then, you know, eat all you want and then leave without paying the check,” the president said. “And if you do, you’re breaking the law. And Congress should think about it the same way that the American people do.”

Obama invoked his electoral cushion multiple times during the hourlong conference, arguing the plan to shrink the deficit through cuts to entitlement programs alone proffered by Republicans is one “the American people profoundly reject.”

Obama said America should first think about paying its bills, then get down to the hard work of deciding how to additional $1.5 trillion he said needs to be addressed in order to solve the deficit problem. Putting the credit of the United States in jeopardy is not the way to accomplish that goal, he said.

Obama also addressed potential gun control measures, leaving open the possibility of attaining some goals through executive action rather than legislation. He hinted at measures such as improved data collection and restriction on the sale of large magazines, like those used in the mass shootings in Aurora, Col., and Newtown, Conn. Obama said he’d be meeting with Vice President Joe Biden later today and that he would unveil his full recommendations later this week.

The press corps repeatedly questioned Obama over his stated position that he would not negotiate on the debt ceiling issue with Republican lawmakers who wanted to use the debt ceiling as a bargaining chip to address deficit spending. At one point, he said Washington needed to “break the habit” of negotiating in crisis mode, as occurred late last year in the so-called “fiscal cliff” negotiations and the debt ceiling negotiations in Summer 2011.
Lawyer has his day in nation’s highest court

Spokane attorney argues case before U.S. Supreme Court

Kb Hill Correspondent

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Standing on the steps outside the nation’s highest court, Spokane attorney Dan Johnson could finally breathe a sigh of relief.

“I think I’ll be able to sleep now,” he said.

On a windy Monday in the nation’s capital, it was the first arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013. Johnson made the case that Michael Descamps, a former Colville resident serving nearly 22 years in prison, is not an “armed career criminal.”

Descamps has a criminal record that stretches back to the 1970s and ends with a 2005 shooting in Stevens County. But not all of his record should have been considered when he was sentenced as a repeat violent offender by U.S. District Court Judge Fred Van Sickle, Johnson argued.

The appeal for a shorter sentence hinges on a California burglary conviction against Descamps more than 30 years ago and was one of the crimes the judge used to justify the longer sentence. Johnson argued the California definition of burglary doesn’t fit because it isn’t necessarily violent.

Assistant U.S. Solicitor General Benjamin Horwich countered that the 22-year sentence was justified. Descamps pleaded guilty to the burglary in 1979, he said, and trial judges need the ability to categorize crimes to “assure greater remaining equity” across the country.

Appeals courts are too nixed in distinctions of each state’s law, and should instead focus “on the conduct that was necessarily admitted,” Horwich added.

District courts differ on how much leeway a trial judge has to interpret previous convictions during sentencing, and a decision in Descamps’ case could settle that issue.

The opinion also could affect hundreds of inmates sentenced as armed career criminals under federal law. The United States Sentencing Commission said 529 inmates had that designation in 2010, the most recent year for statistics.

It could also have implications in deportation cases.

“It’s an interesting area of the law,” Johnson said.

In questioning Horwich, Justice Samuel Alito said the process of determining which state crimes qualify for federal sentencing enhancements had become “extremely complicated, and occasionally produces results that seem to raise no sense whatsoever.”

www.spokesman.com/stories/2013/jan/08/lawyer-has-his-day-in-nations-highest-court/
But Justice Stephen Breyer challenged Johnson's argument, saying the California law is designed to target crimes where the threat of violence is real.

Johnson said later it's difficult to read anything into a justice's comments. "You never know what they're up to," he said.

Monday's arguments ended what he called a "whirlwind four months" after the Supreme Court scheduled the argument. He spent Friday at nearby Georgetown University Law Center practicing with professors and students, which he said helped organize his thoughts and keep his answers brief. Johnson and Descamps will now play the waiting game. A decision in the case will be handed down by the end of June.

For some attorneys, appearing before the U.S. Supreme Court represents the highlight of a career. But Johnson is hopeful he'll stand at the podium again with a case involving mail fraud and illegal immigration that was decided by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in April. Said Johnson, "We'll see if lightning hits twice."

Kip HK, a student in the University of Missouri Washington, D.C., Reporting Program, is a correspondent for The Spokesman-Review.
Day 1: Supreme Court

I arrive at 8:30. Two bundled police officers direct me through the entrance meant for arguing counsel and co-counsel, and then on through the hallway and visitor's entrance to the cafeteria, which would remind you of a luxury hotel's hospitality area. I introduce myself to the petitioning attorney, who I will be interviewing in just a few short hours on the courtroom steps. His coat jacket is off over breakfast, leafing through manila file folders with printed documents. I can see he's around his legal team, and I shuffle off to the other side of the room to compose my thoughts.

Three pens hug the lining of my breast pocket, partnered with a thin reporter's notebook. This is all I can take into the nation's highest courtroom. It leaves me feeling a tad vulnerable. I'm used to sitting in the back of Columbia, Mo., city council meetings, recorder in hand. If I botch something, it will be read by few, and likely they'll forget the next day. I'm quoting Bob McDavid. Today, I'll be taking notes of what is being said by justices of the Supreme Court. Legal scholars at the highest level of the game. If anything is inaccurate, I'm screwed. That's it. Tata, journalism career.

Too nervous for coffee. I already gulped down two cups at home, basking in the comforting glow of IGN's home page, filled with simplistic news that makes sense to me. How much money Texas Chainsaw 3D made, latest Star Wars film rumors, that sort of thing. I get up and nervously pace the main hall of the visitor's area, where artifacts from the construction of the current Court building sit behind glass cases, much like the rest of Washington. I look at the words written on the wall. I'd say “read” if that was actually what I was doing. None of the info sticks. If there's a quiz before I get to go in, I'm doomed.

I saunter over to the press office around 9 a.m. First roadblock — those saloon doors. Waist-high, it immediately gives me pause. How does this damn latch work? I envision the entire press corps staring at me, and push down on what I hope is the latch. Success.

Next roadblock — I've had no contact yet with the woman behind the press office desk. I have no Congressional/White House credentials yet. I'm completely at the whim of this woman. I'm told to wait until the person who's prepared my card arrives. So I sit at a white plastic table in the press room, off to the left side of the courthouse when viewed from the street. Nameplates stick to cubicles belonging to different news organizations. Fox. ABC. CNN. American Lawyer Media. The shabby kid from Kansas City sticks out like a sore thumb. I decide to sit next to the courtroom artist, beneath a sketching of the current court in argument. Chief Justice John Roberts leans forward, his eyes questioning the attorney gesturing toward the bench. I think he's questioning me. On the other side of the drawing, Justice Thomas leans back as in preparation for an afternoon nap. I envy him.

Luckily, there's one in the pit who's more lost than I am. How his uncertainty calms me he'll probably never know. I nab a court schedule for him and chit-chat for a few minutes before trudging up the stairs to the court room. I was here, once before. It was 2006. I was scared out of my mind. Funny how few things change.
It’s an excruciating 30 minutes in the courtroom with nothing but silence to entertain my mind. My cellphone lies in my bookbag down in the basement. A Word Search app will be no comfort today. Instead, I focus on my surroundings. Rows of Doric columns. Murmuring tourists. A fleet of courtroom artists. Before today, I thought they were simply an anachronism. Surely they’d been replaced by machines, right? But this, like the attorneys perched for argument, was their Mecca. And when the justices came in, their pencils were at the ready.

I knew it was going to be a mind-numbing morning. I’ve taken Constitutional Law, and Media Law. I’ve read legal opinions. But it’s fascinating to see the justices simply talk that way. Without prompting. Aside from a few folks bringing some folders to Justice Clarence Thomas (who doesn’t even look as though he’s going to say anything today), there’s no groping for supplementary materials here. Just pure unadulterated legal wisdom on display. I feel like I’m missing a propeller beanie and a shirt proclaiming my ignorance.

I focus hard. Maybe too hard. I’m writing everything down, with the fear there won’t be any way to recapture the words after they’ve been said. The website assured me the transcript would be up later this afternoon, but can I really afford to depend on that? I miss a lot. I don’t understand a lot. Only afterward, when I’m conferring with the petitioning attorney on the front steps of the courtroom, am I assured that my ignorance is not a complete failure for the human race. He’s a bit puzzled too. And I can’t blame him. My head spun after the Oyez were read out.

I trudge slowly back to my basement apartment off New Jersey Ave. Just a short five-minute walk to mull my complete lack of intelligence, and inability to digest what I’ve just seen. But somehow, it works. The transcript is up when I arrive home. The outline I drew up yesterday seems to work. In an hour, I’ve pounded out a 15-inch story that sort of makes sense. I’m in the editing stages now. I’ll let you know how it goes.

One day. One battle. Many more to come.
Chapter Five: Covering state and federal campaigns in an age of dwindling resources: An analysis of three state capital newspapers during the 2012 races

Introduction

One of the major functions of the American press has been its discursive role in political life. Alexis de Tocqueville observed this function early in the 19th century. He noted that American newspapers had both an intellectual and practical impact on the hearts and minds of citizens through their selection of content and how they chose to present it. He said the newspaper was both “the only way of being able to place the same thought at the same moment into a thousand minds” and that, in the absence of newspapers, “there would be hardly any communal action” (Tocqueville, 2003, p. 600-601). In essence, the French thinker was laying out early conceptions of the contemporary theory of framing. Newspapers, in the early days of the republic, had a civic duty to present information in a way that would engage the electorate. In the political arena, Tocqueville understood the importance of this tool, and modern mass media researchers devote a great deal of time and energy to exploring its impact among audiences.

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) are such adherents to a news organizations' power to choose how to present coverage that they urge reporters toward one primary goal — “to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (p. 12). Using this principle as a guide, researchers wander into questions of where and how this idyllic model breaks down — specifically, ways in which political reporters adhere to
certain tropes and themes that neglect substantive discussion of issues. Proposed answers range from changes in technology (Putnam, 2001) to a disinterested and cynical public (Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger and Bennett, 1999) to lapses in practices outlined through the professionalization of journalism (Fico, Freedman, Durisin, 2011). Market forces are included in this spectrum, and recently, market forces have wreaked havoc on the ranks of state-level government reporters (Doroh 2009). This trend raises age-old research questions with a sign-of-the-times veneer.

RQ1: Are daily newspapers in state capitals using the same number of sources in state-level election coverage as national-level election coverage?
RQ2: Are daily newspapers in state capitals using the same variety of sources in state-level election coverage as national-level election coverage?
RQ3: Are daily newspapers in state capitals employing horse-race framing in state-level election coverage more often than in national-level election coverage?

An analysis of election coverage in three newspapers located in state capitals was used to evaluate these research questions.

Theoretical Framework

Framing theory, which provides the basis for this investigation, has become ubiquitous in mass media literature, used to analyze content ranging from racial profiling to political coverage. Scheufele (1999) outlines the theory as it relates to journalism specifically. While suggesting that framing is an extension of agenda-setting, another way reporters, editors and other information-providers may influence the minds of consumers, Scheufele (1999) also points out that its effect is dramatic: It influences the construction of realities and, thus, the decision-making of consumers (pp. 104-105).
In the literature, researchers tend to split political story frames between “horse race” journalism and “substantive” journalism. Broh (1980) used the term “horse race” famously in describing coverage of the 1976 presidential election, laying out certain identifiable characteristics: a great deal of emphasis on and skepticism about polling, playing up spectacle and generally framing the campaign as a sporting event. Academia has run with the metaphor. The fascination with the horse race vs. substantive coverage analysis continues, likely because many researchers have found the effect to be intensifying with the changes in news technology and the structure of the modern campaign (Farnsworth and Lichter, 2006; Iyengar, Norpoth and Hahn 2004; Belt, Just and Crigler, 2012).

Aalberg, Stromback and de Vreese (2012) provide a condensed history of the game and strategy frames scholarship and argue for a more standardized method in the literature for descriptively examining the use of strategy frames in political reporting. The authors attempt to delineate game and strategy frames for the purpose of providing a more specific lexicon for researchers to use to deal with the way daily political journalism is produced in an era of television, Internet and social media. The researchers ultimately arrive at a conceptualization of the horse race as encompassing what they term the “strategic game frame” (Aalberg, Stromback and de Vreese, 2012).

Using an investigation of the framing practices of print reporters at mid-sized newspapers across the United States, Fico, Freedman and Durisin (2011) examine the professional practices and frequency with which reporters publish on a particular
campaign. They explore whether a framing bias exists in a story about a particular candidate or race. The researchers operationalize this bias as “structural imbalance,” or the use of partisan statements on one side that are never evened out through equitable reporting (pp. 103-104). Fico, Freedman and Durisin suggest this may be due to the dwindling number of experienced reporters at mid-size newspapers across the United States. Whether such a phenomenon can be seen in state capital newspapers, evident in their election coverage at two different levels of government, is a specific aim of this project and an extension of framing theory to a novel application across different types of election coverage within the same news source.

**Method**

Wimmer and Dominick (2003) define content analysis as systematic, objective, and quantitative (p. 141). They outline a process that involves establishing a research question, defining a universe and sample, and establishing content categories in order to measure operationalized variables. The authors also point out that content analysis, as a descriptive method, has provided an empirical starting point for investigations into media effects through the theoretic lens of framing (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003, p. 143).

Before selecting a universe and sample, it is important to note limitations researchers have found in comparing newspapers with different sizes, resources and geographical areas to cover in their political coverage. Kahn (1991) finds several variables that can confound analysis of news media attention to a political campaign, including competitiveness, newspaper size, circulation, prominence of other campaigns
and the presence of an incumbent in the race. Efforts to control for these variables may be
confounded, however, by redistricting efforts at the state level to maintain legislative
argues this could have a negative impact on news coverage, and trends in the industry
suggest fewer statehouse resources, which can have an impact on newspapers' ability to
cover state politics (Doroh, 2009).

To ensure accurate sampling of the entire election season, articles from
throughout the campaigns were assessed. In order to ensure adequate sampling
throughout the election cycle, a three-month window was used (Aug. 1, 2012 – Nov. 6,
2012) from which news articles were selected. Within that window, Benoit, Stein and
Hansen's (2005) method of developing two constructed weeks working backward from
Election Day was used to collect the sample. Browser-based database software enabled
full-text search with the names of the houses of the state legislature, and the words
“election,” “campaign” and “race.”

After a preliminary search using Factiva, whose archives include the greatest
number of state capital newspapers among available databases, three newspapers were
selected for specific study: The Wisconsin State Journal (Madison, circulation 83,638),
The Kennebec Journal (Augusta, ME, circulation 11,199), and The Denver Post
(circulation 377,026). For the purposes of coding reliability, stories from The Salt Lake
Tribune (Utah, 109,375 circulation) were analyzed. In addition to an analysis of
newspaper stories, the staffing of these newspapers were also examined. Editorial
professionals were contacted to determine what trend, if any, there has been in assignments to state-level political campaigns. The election in 2008 was used as a benchmark: Did each publication devote more, fewer or about the same number of reporters to state elections as in the previous general election?

The first research question quantified number of sources. To investigate the presence of sourcing, ratio-level variables were used from a method outlined by Fico & Atwater (1986). They counted the number of sources used in a story and averaged them together. The use of multiple sources ties into the deliberative aspect of democracy outlined by de Tocqueville (2003) and the informative function of journalism championed by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007).

Fico and Atwater (1986) go further than simply counting sources. They also look at the role the sources play in the story, either as an official political source, a member of the public or the voice of scholarship. The deliberative function of democracy also demands widespread and varied voices to enable robust public discussion. Accordingly, this research used ratio-level variables to count the number of sources in stories who are political actors or non-political actors. The former group comprised politicians, consultants and individuals directly involved with campaigns, while the latter included scholars and experts in other fields of study. Categorizing sources in this manner examines the degree to which daily newspapers brought in sources other than those quickly relied upon in previous campaign coverage.
The final research question deals with the specific frame that emerges from the way a political story is told. In this research, storytelling roles are defined by what the source is doing in the story — how he/she is contributing to the construction of the writer's central metaphor. The literature addressing how to quantify these statements in a content analysis is much more exhaustive and constructive. Perhaps the most influential is Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) description of strategic framing as creating a spiral of cynicism (a theory for which their text is named) among voters, perpetually weakening their desire for civic engagement. In their groundbreaking theoretical text, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) lay out features of substantive and strategic frames that appear in the empirical work of many subsequent researchers (Lawrence, 2010; Semetko & Valkenberg, 2000; Devitt, 2002).

Lawrence (2010) appropriates the definitions for her empirical study of game vs. issue frame in coverage of the health care debate, a strategy that she chooses to employ in studying randomly sampled news articles as opposed to purposive sampling. Her definitions were adopted with minor caveats geared toward election coverage:

- **Issue**: descriptions of public policy programs or solutions offered by the candidate, descriptions of proposed legislation or other government programs, descriptions of politicians' stands or statements on policy issues.
- **Game**: reference to a politician winning or losing elections, debates, or politics in general, description of campaign or legislative strategies for winning, implications of actions occurring as part of a tactic for winning an election,
paragraphs focused narrowly on a particular campaign event or how the crowd responds to a candidate. (Lawrence, 2010; p. 100)

Wimmer and Dominick (2003) point out that the unit of analysis is “the smallest element of a content analysis but also one of the most important” (p. 148). To that end, some attention must be paid to the level to which framing is measured within a text. Devitt (2002), in particular, argues for measuring framing descriptively in texts on the paragraph level, drawing upon the definition of Cappella and Jamieson (1997) that a frame is a linguistically and philosophically autonomous unit, and that multiple frames may appear in a single unit of journalism (Devitt, 2002, p. 451). This research analyzed frames at the paragraph level. Statements from sources were coded based upon their service to the central frame of the story. While coded independently based on their relationship (either political or otherwise) to the race at hand, statements were coded based on the frame they help construct.

An example may be illustrative. Mordecai Lee, a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, is quoted in a piece covering third-party candidates and their chances against U.S. Congressional frontrunners in the 2nd District — a seat vacated by U.S. Senate candidate (at the time) Tammy Baldwin. The reporter introduces Lee as an academic, although there is also mention of his previous time as a Democratic lawmaker. Within the coding structure of this research (found in its entirety in the appendix), he is identified as a nonpolitical source. However, his statement that third-party candidates are like “political fairy tales” reflects their chances of winning an
election against bigger spenders with a greater Internet presence. As such, his comments are coded as game-based framing within the story.

Finally, Wimmer and Dominick (2003) point out that reliability is pivotal for content analyses to be worthwhile for the academic community (p. 156). News stories during the same time period from *The Salt Lake Tribune* were coded by the author and another graduate student, totaling 11 percent (N=12) of the sample size for the entire study, and reliability was measured using Holsti (1969).

**Interreliability Coding**

We coded the same 12 articles from *The Salt Lake Tribune* independently of each other. The articles were culled from the same dates as those used in the larger comparative study. Holsti's (1969) reliability test calls for taking the number of scenarios the two coders agreed upon and dividing by the total number of possible scenarios. In total, the coders recorded 84 variables independently of each other using the same codebook. In total, the coders agreed on 74 of the decisions, for a Holsti coefficient of .88. Krippendorff (1980) calls for reliability above .7 to indicate a valid test.

For each variable, a Holsti coefficient is provided below:

- Political actors as sources = .92
- Nonpolitical actors as sources = .92
- Total sources = 1.00
- Issue paragraphs = .83
- Game paragraphs = .83
Other paragraphs = .75
Category with most paragraphs = 1.00

Each of these variables meets the Krippendorff (1980) standard and were used in answering the research questions posed above.

**Literature Review**

A great deal of relevant literature has been produced about the ways different media outlets have presented state-level political news, current trends in the industry resulting from a downsizing of reporters and historical studies on framing at a political level below the federal races.

*State-level political coverage*

There is a long history in the literature of a general disinterest with state-level politics across media platforms. Much of the scholarly attention to this phenomenon occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, when the New Federalism movement increased the scope and responsibilities of state governments (Gerston, 2007). Gormley (1978) notes the vast increase in size of state governments and examines the potential ways local television news outlets may increase their coverage of state politics. He argues such an emphasis on state news is necessary “in view of the importance of an informed electorate in a democracy” (p. 356).

Della Carpini, Keeter and Kennamer (1994) use this normative premise that greater state-level coverage is desirable to increase voter knowledge and civic engagement. They combine content analysis of newspaper stories and a survey of readers
in Virginia. First collecting the number of articles focused on state-level political coverage, and then quizzing readers in those coverage areas on their knowledge of state politics, the researchers find a positive correlation between the two variables. Couple that with the wealth of literature combining political knowledge and participation (Putnam, 2001; Gil de Zuniga, 2012; Kensi & Stroud, 2006), and you have a compelling argument for the vital democratic function of reporting state-level political news.

The decline of statehouse reporting

Consequently, it comes as no surprise journalism trade papers have recently focused on the decline in state government reporting. The American Journalism Review is littered with facts, figures and narratives portending the demise of the state beat. Darroh (2009) cites census data taken by the journal indicating a 32 percent decrease in state-capital reporters nationwide between 2003 and 2009, and points out that the gap is being filled by nonprofit organizations, some with an axe to grind. This inspired Gibbons (2010) to argue that someone needed to step up to the plate and hold state-level politicians in check and not the “agenda-driven state 'news' organizations” that have sprouted in the interim. Indeed, researchers in other fields have placed a high regard on statehouse reporters' ability to root out corruption and hold elected officials accountable. Boylan and Long (2003) use a survey of state government reporters in conjunction with other measures to determine public perceptions and actual rates of government corruption. State-level political news also has been shown to have a moderate-to-strong
agenda-setting relationship with the public, despite the relatively small amount of coverage afforded it (Tan & Weaver, 2009).

Horse race coverage of state- and local-level elections

Much of the research attention devoted to the frames used in coverage of political campaigns has been on the national level. When he famously used the horse race metaphor, Broh (1980) was studying presidential elections, a popular target of inquiry for researchers (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005; Zhao & Bleske, 1998). The argument for this wealth of literature devoted to presidential campaigns contains three justifications: Everyone covers the presidential campaign, everyone is affected by a presidential election, and the races are usually more competitive than local campaigns (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005, pp. 357-358).

In studies of political campaigns and issues at a more localized level, researchers may seek to descriptively investigate a particular state or states to show a trend that may be emerging on a grander scale. Stevens, Alger, Allen & Sullivan (2006) select Minnesota as the source of television news coverage analysis to test the theories of social capital formation and political knowledge. The researchers, selecting an area of relatively high levels of social capital seen in the literature, posit the hypothesis that coverage on Minneapolis and St. Paul television stations would broadcast a high level of substantive campaign news, because “if any state should be well served by its local television stations, it is Minnesota” (p. 63). The researchers lament that news coverage too often strayed from local elections and too often sensationalized the competitive race for
president over several close local campaigns, with the implication being that if this is happening in Minnesota, it's likely happening elsewhere (p. 79).

Recent comparative studies of horse race vs. substantive coverage have spread to international coverage, differences between presidential and legislative representatives at the federal level and small-scale, community-based political coverage. Ha (2009) examined the use of the horse race frame between major South Korean and United States newspaper stories about the 2008 presidential election, finding a similar reliance in both countries (though the South Korean newspapers may have simply amplified the effect due to their use of foreign news outlets as a primary source in a plurality of their coverage). Iyengar, Woo and McGrady (2005) conducted a content analysis of Congressional election and presidential election stories, determining what they deemed the “local” congressional stories to be more substantive in nature than those detailing the 2004 campaign between Bush and Kerry. Swafford (2012) focused his analysis on coverage of local campaign coverage in community newspapers (between 2,000 and 50,000 circulation) across Missouri, noting a high level of what he termed “literacy frames,” or those providing essential polling information, over any other kind of frame, including a nearly non-existent presence of horse-race framing.

Limitations, and where to go from here

To date, academic interest in state-level elections has been slanted toward the executive branch and policy issues. Dunn (2009) conducted an agenda-setting analysis comparing the issues broached by Virginia state newspapers and candidates for governor.
Lancendorfer and Lee (2010) follow this path of reasoning in their examination of the 2002 Michigan governor's race. McCune (2003), on the other hand, employs content analysis to investigate the way news media and others framed the discussion of teaching evolution in Tennessee schools as a policy question in the mid-1990s.

This research seeks to fill a gap in descriptive framing studies by investigating the use of substantive vs. game-based frames in news coverage of a state and federal election in three competitive states during the 2012 election cycle. The aim is to illuminate the possible effects of decades of downsizing at statehouses on the way election stories are presented, both in terms of the way they are sourced and the predominant theme of the piece. In order to conduct this analysis, terms must be operationalized.

**Definitions**

The research questions single out “daily newspapers in state capitals.” This research specifically pulled print news stories culled from newspapers serving cities where a state legislature is located. This ensured fair geographic representation by establishing a uniform level of interest and devoted coverage to state politics as other levels of government. Research suggests those papers yield the greatest sample size of state-level news (Atwater & Fico, 1986).

Second, the question deals with issues-based framing. Within the theoretical framework laid out, issues-based framing is negatively defined as that which does not adhere to the horse-race frame defined in the above literature review. Bennett (1996) lays out a normative argument for the role of the press in the political process. Specifically, he
points out the horse race is an example of the “highly ritualized metaphors” used to construct daily political news (p. 378). In other words, when reporters depend on the horse race frame, they are producing a news narrative, or frame, that scratches an already-exhausted surface of campaign coverage. Issues-based coverage is defined as dependence upon original frames that are driven by election issues, rather than polls or endorsements. Category definitions outlined in the methods section of this proposal are designed to delineate these two types of stories.

Working from the outline set forth by Fico and Atwater (1986), the research also investigated the number and type of sourcing in each article examined at the state and federal level. Scheufele (1999) describes framing as a construction of reality, and Bennett (1996) argues horse-race coverage provides a metaphoric representation of political reality that relies too often on the same tropes and surface-level description. Voices in a text piece often provide this context and help establish the metaphor. The horse race, typically, has relied upon polls and public opinion experts, whereas issue-based frames pull in authoritative voices on a number of topics, and voters' perceptions of the candidate. Number and type of sources used in each piece provide a broader picture of the type of metaphor each news outlet creates.

State- and federal-level politics requires some clarification as well. In order to control for the influence and prestige of the elected official, analysis was restricted to candidates for the particular state Legislature and that state's U.S. Congressional candidates.
Findings

A total of 113 articles from three newspapers were analyzed. Figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 show several descriptive statistics. Briefly, 58 stories focused on national races and 55 focused on state-level races were analyzed.

Figure 5.1 Story type in sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.2 Word count descriptive statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story level</th>
<th>Mean word count</th>
<th>Min. word count</th>
<th>Max. word count</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>3853</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>1725</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>496</td>
<td></td>
<td>496</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.3 Day of week sample stories published

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of the Week</th>
<th>Stories published</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The average length of analyzed articles was 816 words, clocking in at around 20 paragraphs. Monday and Tuesday featured the fewest stories, with eight and 10 analyzed stories, respectively. The most coverage appeared on Sunday, with 27 stories, or roughly one quarter of the sample total, appearing in those editions.

The first research question asked whether the newspapers were using a similar number of total sources in constructing their election stories. An independent sample $t$ test was conducted comparing the mean number of total sources used in the two story categories across all three newspapers. The Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was not significant, so equal variances were assumed. No significant difference was found ($t(111) = .78, p > .05$). The mean number of total sources used in federal-level election stories ($M = 3.29, SD = 2.26$) was not significantly more than the total number of sources used in state-level election stories ($M = 3.00, SD = 1.69$). Full results can be found in figures 5.4 and 5.5. From this analysis, it cannot be said that a significant difference exists between total number of sources used in the two levels of election coverage.

**Figure 5.4 Mean number of sources in federal and state election stories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story type</th>
<th>Stories published</th>
<th>Average total sources used</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>2.256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.689</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research question two drills deeper into the issue of sourcing. It asks whether the variety of sourcing differs in coverage of state and federal elections. To operationalize this question, sources were coded as political and non-political actors when used as sources. Independent sample $t$ tests were conducted to evaluate the mean total of both types of sources used in stories at the state and federal level across all newspapers. When comparing political sources, the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was not significant, so equal variances were assumed. No significant difference was found ($t(111) = -1.18, p > .05$). The mean number of political sources used in federal-level election coverage ($M = 2.22, SD = 1.34$) was not significantly different from the mean number of political sources used in state-level election coverage ($M = 2.51, SD = 1.23$). Full results can be found in figures 5.6 and 5.7. Reporters at the three newspapers used roughly the same number of political sources (just more than 2) in federal legislative election stories as state-level legislative election stories.
The same test was carried out comparing the means between the two story categories in their use of nonpolitical sources. In this test, Levene's Test for the Equality of Variances was not significant, so equal variances were assumed. A statistically significant difference was found in the mean number of nonpolitical sources used in \((t(111) = 2.1, p < .05)\). The mean number of nonpolitical sources used in federal-level election stories \((M = 1.07, SD = 1.4)\) outpaced their use in state-level stories \((M = .49, SD = 1.48)\). Full results can be found in figures 5.8 and 5.9. In other words, more nonpolitical sources were likely to appear in stories on federal elections than state elections. As an answer to research question two, political sources appear with roughly the same
frequency, while in federal stories a greater variety of nonpolitical stories were likely to appear in sampled stories.

**Figure 5.8 Mean number of nonpolitical sources in federal and state election stories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story type</th>
<th>Stories published</th>
<th>Average nonpolitical sources used</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.9 Significance test for difference between nonpolitical sources used in federal, state stories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene's test for equality of variances</th>
<th>t test for equality of means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>.236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eq. variances not assumed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final research question deals with story framing. While ratio-level data were collected to investigate this variable in the counting of paragraphs, sampled stories in each category varied in length. Federal stories averaged 22 paragraphs in length, while state stories averaged 18. Therefore, the nominal-level variable identifying the frame employed most prominently in the story was used to explore this research question to control for the paragraph length discrepancy. Because variables were at the nominal level, a Pearson's Chi-Square Test for Association was conducted. A total of 6 stories did
not have a clear frame throughout based upon paragraph totals. Those were removed from this section of analysis for a grand total of 107 stories analyzed ($N = 56$ federal, 51 state).

Prevalence of frame was found to be significantly different between federal and state election stories ($c^2 (2, N = 107) = 6.33, p < .05$). Federal stories employing game framing significantly outnumbered state stories employing the same frame, and state stories employing an issue-based frame significantly outnumbered federal stories employing the same frame. In the “Other” category, stories were close to their expected totals. In the selected sample, then, federal stories were much more likely to lean upon the game theory than state-level stories, and the opposite was true of issue-based framing. Full results can be found in figures 5.10 and 5.11.

**Figure 5.10 Breakdown of federal, state election stories by prevalent frame**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story type</th>
<th>Frame</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Game</td>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5.11 Chi-Square significance test of prevalent frame differences between federal, state stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Degrees of freedom</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square ($c^2$)</td>
<td>6.327$^1$</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>6.404</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of valid cases</td>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The literature review in this paper painted a picture of statehouse reporting on the decline. In speaking with sources at the newspapers analyzed in this study, that picture is realized — to a certain degree. Life imitating academia may be a rarity, but most of the professional journalists who have worked in these newsrooms say that while state-level reporting has become more of a priority, election coverage is still constrained by the demands of individual races. But state reporting on the whole, they say, is on the decline.

At The Denver Post, Tim Hoover contributed to coverage that was analyzed in this research. He covered legislative races for state seats in November but is now working for the paper's editorial board. In 2008, four reporters covered the state house in Denver, Hoover said (personal communication, March 26, 2013). By 2012, there were only two names under the masthead listed as statehouse specialists. By contrast, the paper employs one Washington bureau reporter. In elections, however, the number of reporters devoted to politics fluctuates frequently, Hoover said. But the way he described the changes is instructive. Colorado is very much a “purple state” — it was referred to as such in a

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$^1$ 0 cells have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 15.25.
couple of stories coded for analysis. This leads to lively primaries and general elections. That is to say, close contests. And those close contests invite more reporters into the fray. Despite this, the trend is clear, Hoover wrote in an email: “I will say generally that election staffing has gone down.” That is across the board, not simply limited to state elections. But his answers show that, in terms of staffing cuts, decisions are made not at the level of the race, but by the interests of readers — at least, as perceived by editorial staff.

In Madison, Managing Editor Chris Murphy of the Capital Journal said the newspaper has made a renewed commitment to state-level coverage (personal communication, Feb. 8, 2013). The paper has five full-time reporters covering the state house, two who do so regularly, according to Murphy. The paper also had two full-time state political reporters during election cycles in 2010 and 2008, but only one covered elections on a permanent basis, Murphy said. More reporters were brought in to cover the state races as Election Day approached, mimicking the “all hands on deck” approach described at the Post.

The Journal does not employ a Washington bureau reporter, but it has made a more concerted effort to emphasize original political reporting, Murphy said. However, it's impossible in the sample culled for this analysis to ignore the major Senate race that occurred in Wisconsin during the 2012 campaign: Tammy Baldwin vs. Tommy Thompson. The coverage offered by the Capital Times was also significant in that it made repeated use of the Q-and-A format, which comprised a great deal of the paper's
state-level coverage. This allowed the candidates to speak directly to the voters, with little editorial intervention. The result was a much more issue-based approach to reporting, allowing candidates to expound upon their policy views (which some did, while others took unabashed potshots at their competitors).

The Kennebec Journal is a bit of an anomaly among the newspapers selected for analysis. It uses pooled coverage of state house reporting from three newspapers under the Maine Today Media label. Maine Today's Deputy Managing Editor Dieter Bradbury said that under new ownership the company has made a renewed commitment to state-level political coverage. In 2008 and 2010, the paper employed only one full-time statehouse reporter. During the 2012 cycle, three reporters shared state house duty under the Maine Today label (Dieter Bradbury, personal communication, April 10, 2013). Federal news continues to receive relatively fewer resources than state coverage. Only one reporter, Kevin Miller, covers Washington politics for Maine Today. However, no reporters were in Washington in 2010 after the one-person bureau shutdown following the 2008 campaign, Bradbury said.

When it comes to election coverage, Maine Today's practices mimic the “all-hands-on-deck” approach adopted by other newspaper operations in state capitals. “We basically draft people for specific races,” Bradbury said, noting that the process starts ratcheting up in the final fever-pitch weeks of a campaign. By contrast, on the federal level, one reporter handles the coverage most of the time. Miller wrote the majority of the coverage devoted to the three-way race to replace Olympia Snowe in the U.S. Senate.
Maine Today offers a picture of what collaborative coverage can accomplish—often, the work of one reporter, covering a particular part of the state in the legislature, made it into another of the family's publications. The practical extent of coverage is not unlike that of the *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, which features coverage of both the Washington and Idaho legislatures from two different reporters assigned to Olympia and Boise, respectively. The result is a blend of state-level coverage from reporters with varying styles and journalistic strategies that provides the reader with a multi-layered understanding of local politics.

The picture offered of political reporting at the state and federal level during an election cycle from the selected publications shows the resources devoted to coverage are often fluid in today's staff-shortened newsrooms. While researchers such as Darroh (2009) point to the macro-level decline in state house reporting through the cutting of staff following legislatures full-time, the picture offered by the three news professionals cited above shows a much more practical and real-world approach to news-gathering once the election season is underway. Specifically, more hands are called on deck when warranted by reader and editor interest. However, all three newspapers do have a greater number of resources devoted to state house coverage than federal coverage.

Staff variety and interest-driven coverage strategies may explain the reason for a lack of significant differences in certain professional practices between journalists covering state-level legislative elections and federal-level elections in the newspapers selected for this study. The similarities may also be a symptom of what Alan Ehrenhalt,
an editor previously with Stateline and now with *Governing* magazine, said is his impression of the skills required to report on politics at varying levels. If you can cover a city council meeting, you can cover the state or U.S. legislatures, he said (Ehrenhalt 2013). The widespread adoption of this creed among reporters working their way up from local to federal coverage could explain the lack of a clear distinction in professional practice between seeking out sources, particularly those with political affiliations.

What of nonpolitical sourcing? The difference between state and federal level reporting was stark. On average, federal stories featured about double the number of nonpolitical sources compared to state stories. The variable was operationalized as persons in both an unofficial capacity (neighbors, friends, relatives) and official capacity (bureaucrats, scholars and pollsters) without a political axe to grind. Why are they more frequently cited in national stories? The answer could be, simply, there aren't as many nonpolitical resources in more localized races (Parry, Kisida and Langley; 2008). While this study didn't break down the number of nonpolitical sources into professional pollsters and voters or scholars, the dearth of polling data in smaller races (and, when it does appear at the lower levels, it's often commissioned by the campaigns themselves, which can call into question accuracy) could explain the discrepancy.

Another potential explanation is the lack of scholarly interest in state-level campaigns. The study of political science has been shown over and again to follow the model of top-down, national-to-state thinking (Overby, Kazee & Prince, 2004; Herrnson, Stokes-Brown & Hindson, 2007; Cooper & Richardson, 2006). Thus, while investigating
state governments may provide fodder for academic publications among intellectual peers, the attention of political scientists has been invariably swayed in favor of federal-level politics at the outset. In other words, for pollsters and academics, eyes are mostly glued to the up-ticket races. Journalists may simply be following suit.

The proliferation of poll data may also explain this study's finding with regard to the final research question. A second portion of the operational definition included mentions of money raised and spent during a campaign. Unlike polling data, state-level campaign finance reports are often just as easy — if not easier — to obtain than Federal Election Commission reports. Maine, Wisconsin and Colorado all have publicly accessible campaign finance records online, suggesting the only barrier to including such figures in an election story on either level is the framing choice of the writer.

Finally, the game-based operational definition includes any mention of strategy on the part of the candidate. This manifested itself in paragraphs in which candidates tried to link their opponent to an unpopular figure or pander to a specific base of their party within a given constituency. These are all paragraphs that came up in both levels of election coverage. Because each election analyzed was partisan (though some more competitive than others), the opportunity existed for disparagement in every race. Thus, inclusion of these comments and crafting a frame around them proved a consequence of news judgment rather than the partisan nature of the campaign.

These findings, while limited to three specific newspapers during a single election cycle, provide a snapshot that dovetails with previous research on the prevalence of
game-based (or horse race) coverage of political campaigns. For example, Kahn (1991) found that U.S. Senate campaigns featured more issues-based coverage compared to the media's depiction of presidential campaigns. Follow-up research (Kahn 1995) showed that Senate candidates received more horse-race coverage attention than gubernatorial candidates, suggesting that type of office (legislative or executive) may be less important in influencing coverage substance than scope of the office (federal vs. statewide). While researchers have continued Kahn's strain of legislative vs. executive election framing (Brown & Jacobson, 2008), little work has been done to drill deeper into potential discrepancies between larger and smaller-scale races, and there has been little bridging of the gap between the mass media and political science disciplines. While limited, this research provides a jumping-off point for similar investigations into that relationship.

Some caveats must be introduced. This research was based on a purposive sampling of newspaper stories in states where legislative races at the state and federal level were competitive. Researchers have shown that varying levels of competitiveness create different levels of media and media consumer interest (Goldenberg & Traugott, 1987). By focusing specifically on state capital newspapers as well, sample findings indicating a greater emphasis on issue reporting may be more due to the fact that reporters have in-depth knowledge of state legislative issues rather than issues before Congress, leading them to lean toward strategic, game-based coverage for higher-profile campaigns. In other words, the issues frame predominance may simply be a function of
statehouse reporters writing about what they know and are comfortable relaying to the public — explanations of state policy.

**Conclusions**

This research sought to analyze staff cutting at the state level and its effect on professional practices and the way political stories were told. It did so through the lens of election coverage, where researchers historically have focused their efforts on isolating and quantifying the “horse race” frame found in political coverage. Journalism scholarship historically has shunned the horse race, using its prevalence to explain civic disengagement and cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Valentino, Burr, & Beckmann, 2001). Researchers contend time spent following the horse race is not spent informing decision-making by covering substantive issues (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007).

The study showed that of selected newspapers, the game frame was significantly more prevalent in coverage of federal elections, while issues coverage dominated state-level coverage. Given the connection between gamesmanship and cynicism, the findings suggest readers of statehouse newspapers may develop more pessimistic views of Congress than their state legislature, a theory with some empirical backing (Richardson, Konisky, & Milyo, 2012). This research did not delve into media effects, but future studies could expound upon findings about cynicism at different levels of government and use a similar analysis to evaluate news coverage's contribution to that cynicism. The finding of a discrepancy suggests fruitful outlets for future research into the development of partisanship in America at all levels and the role media plays in this phenomenon.
In addition, the research used the discursive function of journalism as outlined by de Tocqueville (2003) in its assessment of professional practices by journalists at statehouse newspapers. The power of the newspaper, de Tocqueville said, lies in its ability to bring democratic minds together and foster the creation of civil society. In election coverage, the inclusion of more quoted sources and those traditionally outside the realm of politics enables robust discussion unfettered by political spin. This research took as a premise the decline in statehouse reporting and evaluated whether a decline in resources for state coverage was associated with any variance in source-seeking, based on the assumption that statehouse reporters would be stretched thin by newsroom realities and unable to keep pace with the coverage afforded federal candidates.

The newspapers sought out in this project offered a different picture of state campaign coverage. The approach at each newsroom was more of an “all hands on deck” strategy than placing the burden on full-time statehouse reporters, who were for the most part less numerous than they had been in previous election cycles. The findings of this research must be painted by this pragmatic, realistic depiction of the strategies for covering elections at various levels. Staffing decisions are made based on editorial and reader interest and incorporate various personnel in news production, rather than simply title or expertise.

This may explain the agreement in total sourcing and political sourcing used in stories on both federal and state legislative campaigns in the newspapers sampled. However, a discrepancy was found in the number of nonpolitical sources used in race
coverage. This suggests a lower volume of unaffiliated sources providing input on state-level races in the pages of the newspaper. However, because nonpolitical sources were coded in one catch-all category, it is impossible from this research to determine whether this is a consequence of a lack of professional experts on state legislative campaigns or specific journalistic practices. A more widespread study specifically delineating scholarly and nonscholarly sources would be able to answer this question much more fully.

The lack of nonpolitical voices, however, suggests politicians and their surrogates at the state level have firmer control of the discourse than federal political actors. This could have consequences for the discursive ability of readers and their ability to hold elected officials accountable. Future studies could examine source dependence and its effect on readers' ability to engage with a story and their perceptions of the outlet's trustworthiness. Is it the purpose of the newspaper to simply relate what was said, or to evaluate what was said based on the reaction of witnesses and other sources in the know based on the topics? This is a question that would be best answered by consequent questions to readers following a descriptive study like this.

Future research beckoned by this study includes an analysis of newspapers in dissimilar markets should be analyzed using the same framework on a larger scale. This will get at the heart of the question whether geographic and metaphoric proximity to the state capital produces more substantive, issues-based news framing as that illustrated in the selected newspapers.
To get a fuller picture of staffing cuts across times, coverage should be analyzed historically along with staffing numbers to find potential correlation. Each of the newspapers targeted in this study experienced some kind of staffing change, whether it was a glut or a cut, since the 2008 election cycle. Perhaps the best way to conduct such research would be to quantify total average sourcing during the time intervals, to see if a greater emphasis was placed on seeking out voices to tell political stories as newsrooms were in flux. A historical analysis would also negate the effects of a particularly close or high-interest campaign, to see if voter attention and prominence of the race has any effect on newsroom practices. Such research would give newsrooms a better idea of the direct impact staff-cutting measures have on their news coverage quality, and whether the discrepancy found in this research is merely a consequence of the races in the states chosen or a national trend.

As a consequence of the “all hands on deck” approach, news stories could be broken down by author/reporter, to see if those who have less experience covering politics rely on a certain type of frame more often than their seasoned counterparts. Perhaps, as an election cycle grows more frantic and more inexperienced journalists enter the coverage fray, some change takes place on the frame dependence and sourcing.

Finally, this framework could be used outside of the traditional election cycle, simply to see if statehouse coverage during times without so many reporters covering the beat leads to a change in reporting practices as seen through the journalism produced. This research suggests in election cycles, the deleterious effects of staff shrinkage are
mitigated by a warm bodies approach. Perhaps, after an election cycle, the dust clears on a single reporter who finds his hands full with too many stories to cover, leading to a change in his habits and the quality of work produced.

This study paints a significant but incomplete picture of the type of news coverage offered in targeted areas where state government maintains prominence and reporters are sensitive to the issues affecting the state. Discrepancies in professional practices and the framing of campaign stories were found, but the prevalent narrative of the empty desks at the statehouse bureau was not supported as a reason for this discrepancy. In fact, issue-based framing was much more prevalent in state-level election stories produced at bureaus than federal-level campaigns. This should give us some comfort that statehouse bureaus are not shirking their advantage in covering state politics in a comprehensive, issue-based way. However, the dependence upon political sources in state-level campaign coverage should give caution to reporters crafting their stories based on official messages. While complete agreement in these categories may be impossible and undesirable across both levels of election coverage, the variance found should give writers and editors pause about the effect such discrepancies could have on reader engagement in democratic decision-making and the formation of a civil society.
References


Appendix 1: Codebook

The following is a reproduction of the codebook used to analyze stories for this project.

Coder # (Kip 1; Recruit 2)
Story type # (National 1; State 2)
Article Number: alphanumeric code assigned to each story for each individual newspaper and story type.
Day of the week the story was published: Monday – Sunday, write out in full.
Number of words: The total number of words in the article, as appearing in the Factiva database search return.

Count the number of sources who are quoted or paraphrased as POLITICAL ACTORS. These include the candidate themselves, other elected officials or those who previously held office, campaign workers, those identified with a political party or as a member of a political party, actors or voiceovers in political ads and any other source actively involved in the political process.

Count the number of sources who are quoted or paraphrased as NON-POLITICAL ACTORS. These include non-campaigning voters, neighbors of a candidate, poll workers, state officials or other bureaucrats, academics, rally attendees or any source not otherwise involved in the political process directly.

Add together items 6 and 7 to get a total number of sources quoted or paraphrased in the article. Do not include non-human sources, like journals or reports, unless a name is given and the source can be categorized as POLITICAL or NON-POLITICAL ACTOR from the news story.

Count the number of PARAGRAPHS (including quotes) that present an election in an ISSUE-based way. These paragraphs include: descriptions of public policy programs or solutions offered by the candidate, descriptions of proposed legislation, constituent work (such as lobbying for buildings or new programs in the district) or other programs, or descriptions of a politicians’ stands or statements on policy issues. It could also include insight from a source on the effect of legislation or a policy issue, or an explanation of a character trait or quality of a particular candidate. It could also include fact-checking statements, or attempts to investigate the source of a political statement or charge made by one candidate against an opponent. In a Q-and-A format, it would include questions asked about specific policy measures and where a candidate stands on the issue. (see Lawrence, 2010; p. 100)

Count the number of PARAGRAPHS (including quotes) that present an election in a GAME-based way. This includes reference to a candidate winning or losing elections, debates, or politics in general, description of campaign or legislative strategies for winning an election, mentions of poll results, mentions of money spent or raised, paragraphs focused narrowly on a particular campaign event or how a crowd responds to a candidate. It may also include discussion of district boundaries and the process of redistricting and how they’ll affect a campaign. It may also
include charges from a candidate about the activities or statements of their opponent or any attempt to cast the campaign as a fight, battle or conflict without qualification or fact-checking. In a Q-and-A format, the category would include questions aimed at playing up divisiveness between the parties, questions about strategy or those posed about the campaign outlook. (see Lawrence, 2010; p. 100)

Count the number of PARAGRAPHS (including quotes) that fall outside these two categories. These can be mentions of upcoming debates or campaign functions (but not descriptions, those are classified as GAME-based paragraphs), election literacy (where and when to vote, when to register), or exposition providing background information about the candidate with no political implications.

Compare the totals of items 9, 10 and 11. Write the name of the category (GAME, ISSUE, OTHER) with the greatest number of paragraphs in the story.
Appendix 2: Proposal

Introduction

Politics and writing were passions of mine long before I stepped foot in the Journalism School. I came here, specifically, to learn how to write about complicated and important matters with the general public as an audience. Having a background in political science as an undergraduate both helped and hurt me as I began this quest. In early stories I wrote for the Columbia Missourian, I was interested in making broad, thematic connections and jam-packing my sentences with information. I was a thoughtful writer. I wanted to be a good writer. The two go hand-in-hand, I've learned, but in unexpected ways.

Several courses here at the Journalism School have aided me on that path. News Reporting and Advanced News Reporting, and the opportunity to work under several city editors, all of whom helped guide my reporting and writing skills, were two of the most valuable courses in the entirety of my now-lengthy academic career. Intermediate Writing forced me to think about how I was presenting the stories I was telling and challenged me to do a different type of reporting to engage audiences through the use of narrative techniques. These were the same narrative techniques I'd explored, in fiction, during my time as an English literature graduate student at Belmont University.

The other side of the coin is news editing, and I've had a heap of experience on that front during my brief stay at the university as well. First, writing headlines and
editing stories for the print and digital products of the Columbia Missourian forced me to think about grammar and syntax. They also forced me to critique my own reporting skills. That only intensified during the summer I spent working for the Chicago Tribune as part of the Dow Jones News Editing program. I've always been a thoughtful reader and writer. I'm now a thoughtful reporter and editor, the lines between which may be blurring thanks in part to technological evolution and certain realities of the industry. Looking back on the valuable experience I've had with editors at all the places I've gone, I hope that statement isn't true. But I'm preparing myself, anyway.

I'm never going to be a perfect writer, reporter or editor. I've made peace with that (even though I still pull my hair out over every sentence I commit to paper). The purpose of this professional project is to approach the way government reporting is done on both a practical and an analytic level. I'll learn from myself, using the classic “Missouri Method” on the job covering politics in Washington. Through the descriptive study I lay out in this proposal, I will learn from colleagues covering government at both the federal and state level. I've spent many of my young adult years trying to figure out what my skills are and how I want them to contribute to my professional career. My time spent at the Journalism School has brought me to this point, and I'm both excited and confident this capstone to my experience will point me to a job that combines my passions. Eventually, I hope to parlay my professional experiences into teaching and writing informed opinion columns on politics. But first, I need to pay my dues and make sure I
have honed the essential writing and reporting skills needed in journalism. That's where the following particulars of the professional component of my project come in.

**Explanation of the Professional Skills Component**

I have been accepted to the Journalism School's Washington program and have been honored with a White House Press Correspondent's Scholarship. I am currently in the process of submitting my work to several news outlets in the hopes of becoming a daily reporter in the capitol. Those publications include The Spokane Spokesman-Review, The Dallas Morning News, and The Anniston (Ala.) Star. My tasks, for any of these publications, will be similar. I will work on my own to generate story ideas related to the constituencies served by each publication. I will work closely with staff members of the elected officials (and, hopefully, the elected officials themselves) producing daily journalism projects on the major legislative happenings that affect readers. My interests lie in larger policy issues as well. I want to work with my editor(s) to establish a long-term reporting project goal that would examine some specific legislative issue pertinent to my audience. This could be anything from the health care exchange, to agricultural issues facing eastern Washington state, to how automatic spending cuts (if, indeed, the fiscal cliff is approached) would affect the defense industry in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. I would want to report on that issue using all of the skills I have acquired during my time in the Journalism School, including graphic/database work, multimedia and narrative writing, if possible.
I have both the educational background, as a political science graduate, to understand the legislative process and generate my own ideas; as well as the professional experience at the Chicago Tribune reading and editing pieces covering national political issues to understand how to report daily on legislative happenings. My weekly reports will include a portfolio of the work I'm doing, a description of the skills I'm obtaining and using in my daily reporting and some reflection and evaluation from my editors and myself on the work I've produced. In many ways, the final report featuring abundant physical evidence will be a lot like the weekly check-ins I would compile during my advanced reporting semester at the Missourian. They gave me an opportunity to not only get my thoughts together about the work I needed to do, but also allowed me to keep a running log of my musings during the reporting process and synthesize the knowledge that I was collecting.

As a resident of the Washington program, my professional project will receive oversight from Barbara Cochran, the director of the program, and my committee chair, professor Daryl Moen. I will also be in contact with my editor at the Missourian, Scott Swafford, on the progress of both the professional and analysis components of my project. Any of the methodological snafus I run into will be handled by my methodology consultant on this project, professor Maria Len-Rios. Professional oversight will also come from the editor at the publication for which I end up working.

The legislative session will begin Jan. 3, 2013. The swearing in of President Obama will be Jan. 21. My schedule will be largely determined by which publication I
end up working for. Tentatively, I would plan to begin work at the latest by Jan. 14, to
give me some time to gear up before the inauguration. Based on the 14-week
requirement, this would place the end of my reporting obligations on or around April 21.
The date when I must return and defend my project/finish revisions is May 3. This gives
me a couple weeks of wiggle room in which to complete my reporting and finish the
analysis component of my project. I will either schedule my defense a little before the
end of my reporting session or directly afterward, based on the availability of my
committee.

**Explanation of the Analysis Component**

*Theoretical Framework*

One of the major functions of the American press has been its discursive role in
political life. Alexis de Tocqueville observed this function early in the 19th Century. He
noted American newspapers had both an intellectual and practical impact on the hearts
and minds of citizens through their selection of content and how they chose to present it.
He said the newspaper was both “the only way of being able to place the same thought at
the same moment into a thousand minds” and that, in the absence of newspapers, “there
would be hardly any communal action” (Tocqueville, 2003, p. 600-601). In essence, the
French thinker was laying out early conceptions of the contemporary theory of framing.
Newspapers, in the early days of the republic, had a civic duty to present information in a
way that would engage the electorate. In the political arena, Tocqueville understood the
importance of this tool, and modern mass media researchers devote a great deal of time and energy to exploring its impact among audiences.

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) are such adherents to a news organizations' power to choose how to present coverage that they urge reporters toward one primary goal — “to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (p. 12). Using this principle as a guide, researchers wander into questions of where and how this idyllic model breaks down — specifically, ways in which political reporters adhere to certain tropes and themes that neglect substantive discussion of issues. Proposed answers range from changes in technology (Putnam, 2001) to a disinterested and cynical public (Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger and Bennett, 1999) to lapses in practices outlined through the professionalization of journalism (Fico, Freedman, Durisin, 2011). Market forces are included in this spectrum, and recently, market forces have wreaked havoc on the ranks of state-level government reporters (Doroh 2009). This trend raises an age-old research question with a sign-of-the-times veneer.

RQ1: Are daily newspapers in state capitals using the same number of sources in state-level election coverage as national-level election coverage? 
RQ2: Are daily newspapers in state capitals using the same variety of sources in state-level election coverage as national-level election coverage? 
RQ3: Are daily newspapers in state capitals employing horse-race framing in state-level election coverage more often than in national-level election coverage?

These questions are relevant to the professional component of my project in a number of ways. It strikes at how we report political news, and I intend to work for a mid-sized newspaper at the federal level in Washington, reporting on issues of local interest. The depth of my own reporting at the federal level will cast in relief the work of
colleagues who are reporting on state-level politics. And my findings will inform the work that I hope to do in the future — covering government at many different levels.

Framing theory provides the underpinning for my investigation of my research question. A comparative analysis requires a standard with which to evaluate the two types of coverage. Framing theory has become ubiquitous in mass media literature, used to analyze content ranging from racial profiling to political coverage. Scheufele (1999) outlines the theory as it relates to journalism specifically. While suggesting that framing is an extension of agenda-setting, another way reporters, editors and other information-providers may influence the minds of consumers, Scheufele (1999) also points out that its effect is dramatic: it impacts the construction of realities and, thus, decision-making of consumers (pp. 104-105).

Aalberg, Stromback and de Vreese (2012) provide a condensed history of the game and strategy frames, and argue for a more standardized method in the literature for descriptively examining the use of strategy frames in political reporting. The authors attempt to delineate game and strategy frames, for the purpose of providing a more specific lexicon for researchers to use to deal with the way daily political journalism is produced in an era of television, Internet and social media. The researchers ultimately arrive at a conceptualization of the horse race as encompassing what they term the “strategic game frame” (Aalberg, Stromback and de Vreese, 2012). For the purposes of this analysis, depth of coverage will be analyzed through the presence or absence of
elements of the strategic game frame within campaign stories about state- and federal-
level elections.

Some researchers have gone so far as to quantify framing effects — that is, how
the employment of different frames may affect things like voting behavior and opinion of
a particular candidate. Outside of a clinical setting, such research is virtually impossible
to successfully conduct. Descriptive studies simply examine the framing devices
prevalent in different media platforms or across different versions of the same platform.

One such approach was taken by Dardis (2006). In looking at framing of protest
movements in the United States and press coverage of those movements, Dardis (2006)
establishes a set of “marginalization devices” using literature in various academic fields,
and then uses those devices as the basis for analyzing content from major U.S.
newspapers about one specific protest movement. While the analysis was quantitatively
based, it had at its root in framing theory by analyzing how many of these framing
devices appeared in each news piece. Park, Holody and Zhang (2012) use a similar
approach in examining media coverage of the Virginia Tech shootings and racial bias.
Indeed, the framework is found in many investigations of bias in the news media,
including politics. Fico, Freedman and Durisin (2011) examine the professional practices
and frequency with which reporters publish on a particular campaign to examine if there
is a framing bias in the way a story is told about a particular candidate or race — what
they operationalize as “structural imbalance” in the story, or the use of partisan
statements on one side that are never evened out through equity reporting (pp. 103-104).
Interesting to my particular research, the authors suggest this may be due to the dwindling number of professional, experienced reporters at mid-sized newspapers across the United States.

In the literature, researchers tend to split political story frames between “horse race” journalism and “substantive” journalism. Broh (1980) used the term “horse race” famously in describing coverage of the 1976 presidential election, laying out certain identifiable characteristics: a great deal of emphasis and skepticism of polling, playing up spectacle and generally framing the campaign as a sporting event. Academia has ran with the metaphor.

The fascination with the horse race vs. substantive coverage analysis continues, likely because many researchers have found the effect to be intensifying with the changes in news technology and the structure of the modern campaign (Farnsworth and Lichter, 2006; Iyengar, Norpoth and Hahn 2004; Belt, Just and Crigler, 2012). The work that I produce in the spring, if successful, will add to discussions of framing and how the exodus of statehouse reporters is affecting the substantive depth of coverage — if, indeed, it is at all. It will continue a discussion begun by mass media researchers at the presidential level, and then on down through the ranks of federal and state campaigns, and finally areas of policy interest. Most of all, it will mesh nicely with the work I hope to produce, informing the way I go about my reporting on federal-level government, though not during an immediate election cycle.

**Method**
Wimmer and Dominick (2003) define content analysis as systematic, objective, and quantitative (p. 141). They outline a process that involves establishing a research question, defining a universe and sample, and establishing content categories in order to measure operationalized variables. The authors also point out that content analysis, as a descriptive method, has provided an empirical starting point for investigations into media effects through the framing theoretical lens (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003, p. 143). As the research question has already been stated above, this section will be devoted to the method of selecting a universe, how the sample will be derived, and the research-established category codes that will be used to investigate the question.

Before selecting a universe and sample, it is important to note limitations researchers have found in comparing newspapers with different sizes, resources and geographical areas to cover in their political coverage. Kahn (1991) finds several variables that can confound analysis of news media attention to a political campaign, including competitiveness, newspaper size, circulation, prominence of other campaigns and the presence of an incumbent in the race. Efforts to control for these variables may be confounded, however, by redistricting efforts at the state level to maintain legislative majorities, limiting campaign competitiveness (Lublin & McDonald, 2006). Kahn (1991) argues this could have a negative impact on news coverage, and trends in the industry suggest fewer state house resources which can have an impact on newspapers' ability to cover state politics (Doroh, 2009). To optimize sampling and ensure the greatest amount of media attention, races in a state where the contest for the legislature is competitive will
be analyzed. For the purposes of this project, that state will be Maine, where both the state House and Senate were up for grabs in the 2012 general election. Of course, this calls into question whether the abundance of horse race coverage is due to professional journalistic practices or the nature of the campaigns themselves. The second state for my analysis will be one in which the contest for control of the state legislature is not as pronounced. For the purposes of this project, that will be Texas. A third state, New York, will be chosen for intercoder reliability tests to ensure proper coding procedures before analysis begins.

In searching for a sample, these issues prove problematic. Major newspapers, in choosing which coverage to carry, may slant toward the federal-level elections because of their perceived importance. The stories that do run in many of the metropolitan newspapers may come from wire services or other contracted news bureaus. Accordingly, each news article will be coded according to the original news outlet, whether that be a state news agency, wire service or reporter for the publication itself. A discussion of the impact of these discrepancies will take place in the findings section of the analysis.

To ensure accurate sampling of the entire election season, articles from throughout the campaigns will need to be assessed. State legislative races vary in the length of time candidates are allowed to campaign, but are generally limited to a 90-day window. Within that window, Benoit, Stein and Hansen's (2005) method of developing two constructed weeks working backwards from election day will be used to collect the sample. Lexis enables searching the entire text of an article. Search terms will include the
names of the candidates, and the words “election” and “campaign” in order to ensure articles about the campaign season are collected as opposed to news stories about an incumbent's policies, which may skew the results in one narrative direction.

The first section of the research question relates to sourcing directly. To investigate the presence of sourcing, ratio-level variables will be used from a method outlined by Fico & Atwater (1986). The authors classify sources into print, personal and action sources, then further separate sources in these three categories. For the purpose of this research, sources will be divided into substantive and gamesmanship categories. While Fico & Atwater were interested in the way sources were gathered and presented in news packages, my interest lies squarely in the framing theoretical framing. Sources will be classified based upon their statements, rather than their professional titles or position relative to the candidate or campaign. For example, a staffer could provide an explanation of a candidate's position on an issue, which would be issue-based coverage. They may also comment on poll numbers within the state, which would place them within the gamesmanship category. Roles, in other words, are defined by what they are doing in the story — how they are contributing to the construction of the writer's central metaphor. These variables will be measured on a ratio scale, counted the same way as they are by Fico & Atwater (1986).

The second portion of the research question deals with issues-based versus competitive framing, in which the literature is much more exhaustive and instructive. Perhaps the most influential in the literature is Cappella and Jamieson's (1997)
description of strategic framing as creating a spiral of cynicism (a theory for which their text is named) among voters, perpetually weakening their desire for civic engagement. In their groundbreaking theoretical text, Cappella and Jamieson lay out features of substantive and strategic frames that appear in the empirical work of many subsequent researchers (Lawrence, 2010; Semetko & Valkenberg, 2000; Devitt, 2002). Lawrence (2010) appropriates the definitions for her empirical study of game vs. issue frame in coverage of the health care debate, a strategy that she chooses to work with randomly sampled news articles as opposed to purposive sampling, which is employed by Cappella and Jamieson (1997). Her definitions, while geared toward coverage of a topic as opposed to a campaign, are instructive for this avenue of research, and will be adopted with minor caveats geared toward my specific avenue of research:

**Issue**: descriptions of public policy programs or solutions offered by the candidate, descriptions of proposed legislation or other government programs, descriptions of politicians' stands or statements on policy issues.

**Game**: reference to a politician winning or losing elections, debates, or politics in general, description of campaign or legislative strategies for winning, implications of actions occurring as part of a tactic for winning an election, paragraphs focused narrowly on a particular campaign event or how the crowd responds to a candidate. (Lawrence, 2010; p. 100)

Wimmer and Dominick (2003) point out that the unit of analysis is “the smallest element of a content analysis but also one of the most important” (p. 148). To that end,
some attention must be paid to what is being quantified and the level to which framing will be measured within a text. Devitt (2002), in particular, argues for measuring framing descriptively in texts on the paragraph level, drawing upon the definition of Cappella and Jamieson (1997) that a frame is a linguistically and philosophically autonomous unit, and that multiple frames may appear in a single unit of journalism (Devitt, 2002, p. 451). Using Lawrence (2010), coding will be done on a paragraph level, then a determination will be made if the story uses a majority of game framing, issue framing or mixed, as outlined in the definitions cited above.

Finally, Wimmer and Dominick (2003) point out that reliability is pivotal for content analyses to be worthwhile for the academic community (p. 156). News stories from outside the sample will be coded by the author and a recruited graduate student totaling 15% of the sample size for the entire study, and reliability will be measured using Holsti (1969).

**Literature Review**

I turn from theory and method of my research to the relevant literature that has been produced about the ways different media outlets have presented state-level political news, current trends in the industry resulting from a downsizing of reporters and historical studies on framing at a political level below the federal races.

*State-level political coverage*

There is a long history in the literature of a general disinterest with state-level politics across media platforms. Much of scholarly interest in this phenomenon occurred
during the 1970s and '80s, when the New Federalism movement increased the scope and responsibilities of state governments (Gerston, 2007). Gormley (1978) notes the vast increase in size of state governments and examines the potential ways local television news outlets may increase their coverage of state politics. He argues such an emphasis on state news is necessary “in view of the importance of an informed electorate in a democracy” (p. 356). This is typical of research in the area of state news coverage — the normative assumption that state news coverage leads to increased knowledge, which in turn leads to increased democratic participation, the main goal of any news organization.

Della Carpini, Keeter and Kennamer (1994) use this as a premise for a descriptive and survey study of newspaper readers in Virginia. First collecting the number of articles focused on state-level political coverage, and then quizzing readers in those coverage areas on their knowledge of state politics, the researchers find a positive correlation between the two variables. Couple that with the wealth of literature combining political knowledge and participation (Putnam, 2001; Gil de Zuniga, 2012; Kenski & Stroud, 2006), and you have a compelling argument for the vital democratic function of reporting state-level political news.

*The decline of statehouse reporting*

That journalism trade papers have focused in the last several years on the decline in coverage of state government reporters should consequently comes as no surprise. The American Journalism Review is littered with facts, figures and narratives portending the demise of the state beat. Darroh (2009) cites census data taken by the journal indicating a
32 percent decrease in state-capital reporters nationwide between 2003 and 2009, and points out that the gap is being filled by nonprofit organizations, some with an axe to grind. This inspired Gibbons (2010) to argue that someone needed to step up to the plate and hold state-level politicians in check and not the “agenda-driven state 'news' organizations” that have sprouted in the interim. Indeed, researchers in other fields have placed a high regard on statehouse reporters' ability to root out corruption and hold elected officials accountable. Boylan and Long (2003) use a survey of state government reporters in conjunction with other measures to determine public perceptions and actual rates of government corruption. State-level political news has also been shown to have a moderate-to-strong agenda-setting relationship with the public, despite the relatively small amount of coverage afforded it (Tan & Weaver, 2009).

State-level political coverage performs an informative function for the discourse of American politics on a level that stands between local and national news. It does so in an era when resources are shrinking at statehouse bureaus and the public clamors for dramatic election news (Iyengar, Norpoth & Hahn, 2004). It also does so in an era when devolution has increased the scope and responsibilities of state government to a level consummate (and, perhaps, surpassing) the impact of federal government (Della Carpini, Keeter and Kennamer, 1994, p. 444). Such responsibility, given the normative assumptions of political knowledge from news media needed for participation proffered by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007), requires a level of coverage that is issues-based and eschews the “game” or “horse race” frame.
Horse race coverage of state- and local-level elections

Much of the research attention devoted to the frames used in coverage of political campaigns has been on the national level. Broh (1980) himself was studying presidential elections, a popular source of inquiry for researchers (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005; Zhao & Bleske, 1998). The argument for this wealth of literature devoted to presidential campaigns contains three justifications: Everyone covers the presidential campaign, everyone is impacted by a presidential election, and the races are usually more competitive than those at a more local level (Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005, pp. 357-358). These are research justifications with which those investigating horse-race coverage in less prominent elections must deal.

In studies of more lower-level political campaigns and issues, researchers may seek to descriptively investigate a particular state or states to show a trend that may be emerging on a more pronounced scale. Stevens, Alger, Allen & Sullivan (2006) select Minnesota as the source of their analysis of television news coverage to test the theory of social capital formation and political knowledge. The researchers, selecting an area of relatively high levels of social capital seen in the literature, posit the hypothesis that coverage on Minneapolis and St. Paul television stations will broadcast a high level of substantive campaign news, because “if any state should be well served by its local television stations, it is Minnesota” (p. 63). The researchers lament, then, the fact that news coverage too often strayed from local elections, and too often sensationalized the
competitive race for president over several close local campaigns, with the implication being that if this is happening in Minnesota, it's likely happening elsewhere (p. 79).

An earlier study by Atwater & Fico (1986) also tackled news coverage of local campaigns. The comparative focus of their study pitted practices of print and broadcast mediums against each other, to determine whether “newspaper and broadcast reporters exhibit similar source priorities when it comes to gathering information and disseminating information” (p. 55). The terminology of the horse race frame does not appear in the research, however, choice of information source has been used in empirical studies of the way news stories are told (Zoch & Turk, 1998). From a small sample of Michigan statehouse reporters (N=25), the researchers determine that the print journalists depended on a greater number and variety of sources, leading to more discursive-based coverage of state politics by introducing a wider variety of ideas (Atwater & Fico, 1986, p. 60). The researchers tie sourcing into the normative analysis of state-level political coverage, positing a greater presence of sources leads to stories that invite pluralism in much the same way Tocqueville conceived the early American newspaper.

More recent comparative studies of horse race vs. substantive coverage have focused on the national scale, differences between presidential and legislative representatives at the federal level and small-scale, community-based political coverage. Ha (2009) examined the use of the horse race frame between major South Korean and United States newspaper stories about the 2008 presidential election, finding a similar reliance in both countries (though the South Korean newspapers may have simply
amplified the effect due to their use of foreign news outlets as a primary source in a plurality of their coverage). Iyengar, Woo and McGrady (2005) conducted a content-analysis of Congressional election and presidential election stories, determining what they deemed the “local” Congressional stories to be more substantive in nature than those detailing the 2004 campaign between Bush and Kerry. Swafford (2012) focused his analysis on coverage of local campaign coverage in community newspapers (between 2,000 and 50,000 circulation) across Missouri, noting a high level of what he termed “literacy frames,” or those providing essential polling information, over any other kind of frame, including a nearly non-existent presence of horse race framing.

Limitations, and where to go from here

To date, academic interest in state-level elections has been slanted toward the executive branch and policy issues. Dunn (2009) conducted an agenda-setting analysis comparing the issues broached by Virginia state newspapers and candidates for governor. Lancendorfer and Lee (2010) follow this path of reasoning in their examination of the 2002 Michigan governor's race. McCune (2003), on the other hand, employs content analysis to investigate the way news media and others framed the discussion of teaching evolution in Tennessee schools as a policy question in the mid-1990s.

This research seeks to fill a gap in descriptive framing studies by investigating the use of substantive vs. game-based frames in news coverage of a state and federal election in two states during the 2012 election cycle. From these results, a clearer picture will emerge of the effect of downsizing at statehouses on the way election stories are
presented, both in terms of the way they are sourced and the predominant theme of the piece. In order to conduct this analysis, terms must be operationalized and a clear method must be set forth.

**Definitions**

For the purposes of this project, some terms in the research question will need to be operationalized. The newspapers to be studied in each state include those listed in the Newsbank Database for each state. Newsbank breaks down archived sources into web-only content, video transcripts and newspapers. In searching for a sample, only those sources listed as “newspapers” will be singled out for collection.

Second, the question deals with issues-based framing. Within the theoretical framework I have laid out, issues-based framing will be negatively defined as that which does not adhere to the horse-race frame defined in the above literature review. Bennett (1996) lays out a normative argument for the role of the press in the political process. Specifically, he points out the horse race is an example of the “highly ritualized metaphors” used to construct daily political news (p. 378). In other words, when reporters depend on the horse race frame, they are producing a news narrative, or frame, that scratches an already-exhausted surface of campaign coverage. Issues-based coverage, then, will be defined as dependence upon original frames that are driven by election issues, rather than polls or endorsements. This definition meshes with that outlined by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007), who suggest the press' first duty is to inform the public so that they can make rational democratic decisions.
Working from the outline set forth by Fico and Atwater (1986), my research will also investigate the number and type of sourcing in each article examined at the state and federal level. Scheufele (1999) describes framing as a construction of reality, and Bennett (1996) argues horse-race coverage provides a metaphoric representation of political reality that relies too often on the same tropes and surface-level description. Voices in a text piece often provide this context and help establish the metaphor. Indeed, sourcing and framing have been linked in academic studies of the way news outlets present a story (Coleman, Thorson & Wilkins, 2011). The horse race, typically, has relied upon polls and public opinion experts, whereas issue-based frames pull in authoritative voices on a number of topics, and perceptions of the candidate by voters themselves. Number and type of sources used in each piece will provide a broader picture of the type of metaphor each news outlet is creating through the framing of their political news.

State- and federal-level politics requires some clarification as well. In order to control for the influence and prestige of the elected official, my analysis will be restricted to candidates for the particular state Senate and that state's U.S. Senate candidates. While the size of state Senates vary, they are uniformly more exclusive than state Houses (where, of course, a bicameral system is employed), just as the U.S. Senate is more exclusive than the federal House of Representatives. No comparison will be perfect in this sense, however the potential for variance in the results based on constituency size and prestige will be included in the discussion portion of my analysis and the potential limitations of my findings.
Publication Possibilities

Any original research dealing with the intersection of politics and journalism has a healthy number of publication opportunities. The top-of-the-line scholarly journals include the Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, Political Communication, and the International Journal of Press/Politics. Other mass-media and political journals I would pitch this to, if the results are interesting, include State Politics & Policy Quarterly, the Newspaper Research Journal and Mass Communication & Society. Looking at potential conferences, one of my favorites (and one I presented at as an undergraduate) is the Midwest Political Science Association conference in Chicago. It would be a nice return visit, and there are usually some interesting sessions on the intersection of the media, public policy and campaigning. Another option is the International Communication Association annual meeting, which has featured many speakers on political framing in past years. The National Communication Association annual meeting also has featured speakers on framing in political journalism, and might be a better fit given my foray into state-level politics with this research.