

Congress needs House-cleaning lessons from Missouri

Members of the U.S. Congress should take a look at Missouri's Legislature on how to deal with U.S. Rep. George Santos, R-New York, who is facing a number of allegations.

Santos campaigned falsely portraying himself as Jewish, saying that his mother was at the World Trade Center on 9/11 and making other claims subsequently proven false.

In contrast to the inaction by Congress dealing with his lies and alleged criminal actions, Missouri provides profound bipartisan examples in the past 15 years of admonishing government officials for unacceptable behavior.

In those years, the disciplinary actions had overwhelming bipartisan support regardless of the party affiliation of the person facing charges of misbehavior or the party in power pursuing action.

In 2017, a Republican-controlled Missouri Senate by a bipartisan vote censured state Sen. Maria Chapelle-Nadal, D-University City, for a social media post expressing a hope that President Donald Trump would be assassinated.

Even the Senate's Democratic leader, Gina Walsh, D-Bellefontaine, neighbors in St. Louis County, voted in support of the censure.



PHILL BROOKS

Globe columnist

In 2018, GOP House Speaker Todd Richardson established a committee to investigate various allegations about fellow Republican, Gov. Eric Greitens, involving charges of sexual abuse and campaign finance violations. The committee's report, signed by both Republican and Democratic committee members, concluded the female victim was credible in her allegations. After that report, top Republican leaders ended up calling for the Republican governor to resign.

Although the House committee was not termed an "impeachment committee," legislators of both parties called themselves into a special session to impeach the governor based on the committee's findings

Maybe Missouri members of Congress could point out to their colleagues from other states how Missouri's Legislature has handled misbehavior of its own members

Greitens ended the impeachment session when he sent a message to the Legislature of his resignation as governor.

Another example that members of Congress might want to consider was the 2021 decision by Republican House Speaker Rob Vescovo to strip the committee assignments of fellow Republican state Rep. Trica Derges, of Springfield, after she was indicted for federal medical fraud violations. Vescovo went even further, moving her to a Capitol office the size of a closet.

Next on this list for members of Congress to consider is the overwhelmingly bipartisan vote in the Missouri House, also in 2021, to expel newly elected state Rep. Rick Roeber, R-Lee Summit in Jackson County, after his children sent to the Republican House speaker allegations of sexual abuse.

Not one House member voted against his expulsion.

Significant for Congress to consider about that action is that the allegations against Roeber were about his actions before he became a member of the Missouri House.

Missouri House action on state Rep. Wiley Price, D-St. Louis City, was a vivid demonstration of the bipartisan ability of Missouri lawmakers to deal with misbehavior.

In 2021, The Republican-controlled House Ethics Committee found Price had lied about an allegation he had a sexual encounter with a legislative intern.

Then, by an overwhelming vote of both Republicans and Democrats, the House voted to censure him and expel him from all House committees and fine him for the cost of

the legislative investigation.

These Missouri legislative examples illustrate striking differences about how the U.S. House likely will deal with misbehaving members in particular, especially because the U.S. House speaker's party has a slim and fragile majority.

I would be remiss in this column if I did not acknowledge the bad behaviors of a few legislators I covered decades earlier.

There were some truly egregious incidents, including a male legislator who attempted to assault a female staffer in another room during a committee hearing.

But in subsequent decades, I've been impressed at the degree to which Missouri's legislature has cleaned up its act and become more aggressive in enforcing appropriate behavior.

Maybe Missouri members of Congress could point out to their colleagues from other states how Missouri's Legislature has handled misbehavior of its own members.

PHILL BROOKS has been a Missouri Statehouse reporter since 1970.

IP reforms would protect rural areas

For more than 100 years, Missouri has had an initiative petition system enshrined in its constitution. The IP process is a beautiful way for Missourians' voices to be heard because it allows citizens to put an issue on the ballot for a statewide vote.

However, if we value a representative government, we understand this process should be rarely used to amend our state constitution. As it currently exists, though, it allows anyone with deep pockets to change our most sacred document. Opponents of IP reform have said our republic depends on the power of its citizens to be directly involved in their government. We are. Every two years we vote in representatives to the Missouri House and every four years to our state senate to represent our interests.

As state Rep. Cody Smith, R-Carthage, once said, "Complex issues cannot be decided at the ballot box."

We elect representatives to read pages and pages of technical terms, current statutes, weigh unforeseen consequences, investigate the fiscal notes, casting an eye for every nuance of an issue.

Currently, it takes only a simple majority — 50% plus one — statewide to ratify an amendment to the Missouri Constitution, and we've seen that those votes can come from very few geographic areas, mostly the urban population centers. This does a very poor job of protecting the rights of those in rural or less densely populated areas.

Take the marijuana initiative petition for one example. A 43-plus page ballot initiative with confusing language and components was expected to be voted on with a simple "yes or no." Only 16 of the 116 reporting counties approved Amendment 3 — the other 100 said no. Is this a true

representation of the will of Missouri communities? Did we really understand what we were voting for?

Some conservatives have suggested we gut the IP process by upping the percentage needed to pass an amendment to 60% or more. This was tried in Arkansas at the last election, and it failed.

With the proposed Concurrent Majority Ratification Reform Resolution now making its way through the Missouri Legislature, it is not taking away the voice of the people, just tightening the parameters.

The Concurrent Majority Ratification has two components for ratifying an amendment to the state constitution. First, a majority of voters statewide must vote "yes" and also a majority of voters in each of more than half the 163 state House districts would have to vote "yes." This is similar to how the Electoral College operates and is the same principle we use to amend the U.S. Constitution.

Amending the state constitution in Missouri should not be taken lightly.

In a state that votes predominately conservative, how have we seen so many progressive policies codified in the state's constitution in recent years? Progressive groups have found Missouri's IP quite vulnerable.

Legislators have already seen pro-abortion language for 2024, and deep pockets will come in and change Missouri's Constitution once again.

This is why the Jasper County Republican Central Committee and many other committees across our state have adopted a resolution to support HJR 30, SJR 28 and HJR 33.

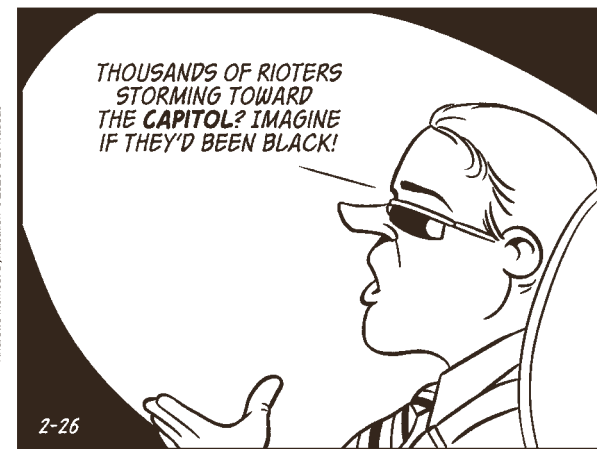
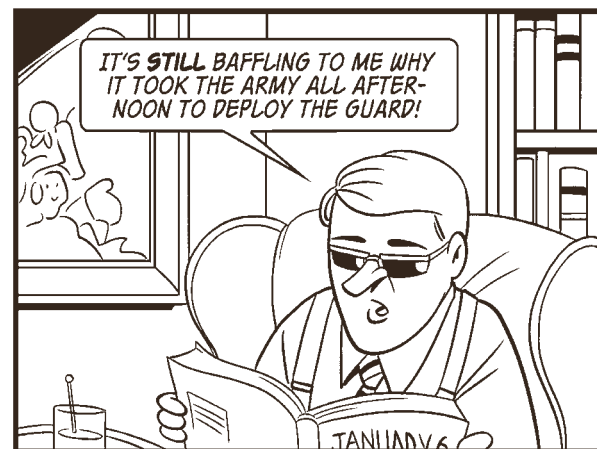
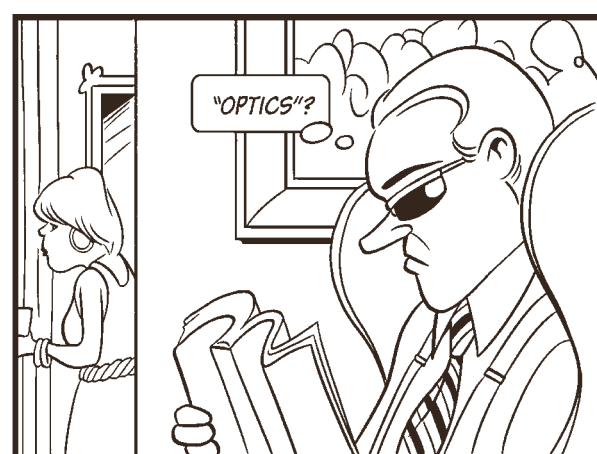
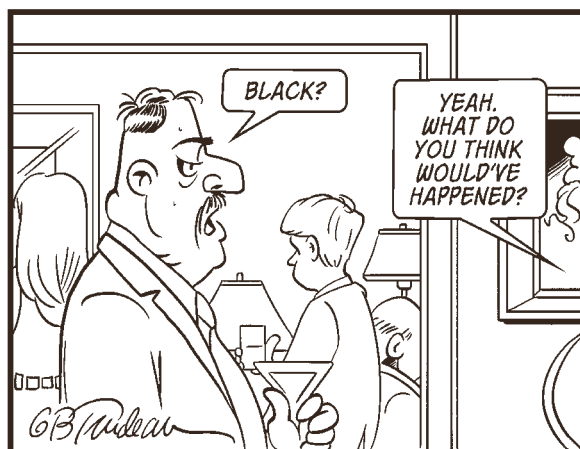
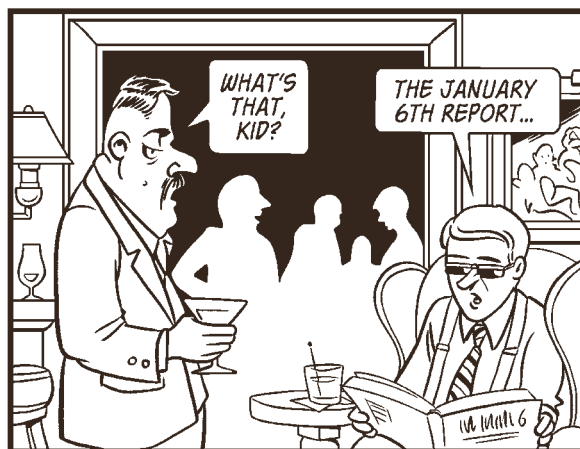
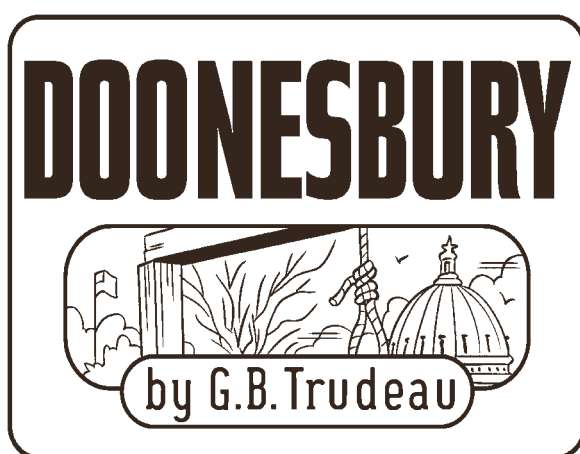
You can see the full text of these bills by visiting house.mo.gov and senate.mo.gov and entering the bill number in the search engine.

CATHY JO LOY is chairperson of the 7th Congressional District Republican Committee and vice chairperson of the Jasper County Republican Central Committee.



CATHY JO LOY

Guest columnist



Biden's military blundering emboldens America's enemies

It was a toss-and-turn Sunday night that turned into an upside-down Monday morning.

Somewhere in the fog that is between 4 and 4:30 a.m., I'd switched on the TV, and the news was breaking that President Joe Biden had made a surprise visit to Kyiv, Ukraine.

My initial reaction was, "Way to go Joe," a U.S. president delivering a political and publicity snub of snubs to a tyrant deserving far more.

And then ol' Scranton Joe opened his mouth. Out came words that must have seemed quite Reaganesque when they were rattling around inside that empty head of his, but when physics took over and they made their way out for recorded history, they were as stately as a Kip's Big Boy statue trying to entice passing motorists to pop in for a double cheeseburger and fries.

The drama-dripping opening: "It was very late at night in Washington, very early in the morning here in Kyiv. Russian planes were in the air, and tanks were rolling across your border.



GEOFF CALDWELL

Globe columnist

You told me that you could hear the explosions in the background. I'll never forget that. And the world was about to change. "I remember it vividly, because I asked you — I asked you next — I asked you, 'What is there, Mr. President? What can I do for you? How can I be of help?' "And I don't know that you remember what you said to me, but you said, and I quote, 'Gather the leaders of the world. Ask them to support Ukraine. Gather the leaders of the world, and ask them to support Ukraine.' "And you said that you didn't know when we'd be able to speak again. That dark night, one year ago, the world was literally, at the time, bracing for the fall of Kyiv. Biden can't remember what he had for lunch the day before yesterday, but we're supposed to believe he recalls in detail a late

night phone call from a year ago? And what's a Biden speech without a rambling embellishment of a memory past?

There was the telling of how many times he'd been to Kyiv (Hint: It's far more than he's been to our own southern border), how the city had "captured a part of my heart" (If only the residents of East Palestine, Ohio, had renamed their town "Kyiv" before that train derailment sent toxic chemicals all over the place.) And closing with yet another disingenuous Biden promise about "freedom is priceless; it's worth fighting for as long as it takes. And that's how long we're going to be with you, Mr. President: for as long as it takes."

When air raid sirens went off while he and Volodymyr Zelensky were walking the streets and no one ran for cover, it was obvious this wasn't the "daring, dangerous" mission his team had hoped to portray. CNN's Alex Marquardt reported it was the first time in days the sirens had gone off and in a press conference later, national security adviser Jake Sullivan said that the administration had notified the Russians of Biden's visit prior to his arrival.

Typical Biden — the truth behind the scenes is quite different from the drama on screen.

Worst of all, Monday's "anniversary" never needed to happen. Last Monday began the day that Biden decided that he was going to be the president who "ended the war" before the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The chaos that was Biden's bugout of Afghanistan will be taught in war colleges for time immortal of everything not to do. The needless deaths of 13 Americans was horrific enough, but the weakness it showed our enemies is coming back at us hard and fast.

When Biden showed that he was willing to abandon one of the most strategic pieces of real estate in the world for a political speech, our enemies were watching.

And when the president prattled on about "minor" or "major"

incursions, sanctions and differences within NATO at his January 2021 press conference, Putin knew his time had come.

Add in that the U.S. and Western allies had refused to bulk up Ukrainian defenses and invasion was imminent.

Yet even after the invasion there was still time for a quick end, but again Biden botched it.

What the Ukrainians needed most — air defenses, long-range artillery, tanks, which would have pushed the Russians back before digging in — not only arrived too late, some of it still isn't in theater.

The Ukrainian people are willing to sacrifice, its army is willing to fight, but unless Biden and the Western allies deliver the weapons needed and deliver them now, next year's anniversary will be of Ukraine under Russian occupation and China readying to take Taiwan.

Yes, I'm worried, I'm very worried.

GEOFF CALDWELL lives in Joplin. He can be reached at gc@caldwellscorner.com.