On the Outside Looking In

By John Clayton

As I write this, the election has not yet occurred, and you may not even have voted yet (unless, of course, you took advantage of early voting). If you have already voted, I guess I shouldn’t assume that you won’t vote again, especially if you are a Democrat, as it is a given in some Upcounty circles that early voting is a cover for repeat voting by the majority party. Well, lighten up, guys, it isn’t that at all. Democrats don’t have to vote twice in a one-party state, they already know they’re going to win. It may not be North Korea, where the winner gets at least one hundred percent, but it’s probably the next best/worst thing.

This one-party thing is, of course, not healthy. I grant you that I am probably more accepting of it if it is my party instead of your party, but on the off chance that I wake up tomorrow and my wife tells me we’re moving to Wyoming, I should not speak kindly of one-party rule. While I have my partisan side, I have always seen the value, in government at any level, of having elections that periodically go to the out-of-power party. This is the principle known as: Throw the Bums Out. It is a house cleaning; it is desirable and absolutely necessary for good government. If nothing else, with a bow to the pathologically cynical, it at least gives the other folks a chance to feed at the trough for a few years, but as I retain a semblance of faith in the existence of honest legislators and the possibility of effective governance, I will reject that premise and move on.

If the Tea Party is ever truly successful, I wonder if its principles will survive actually getting the job. If a basic premise of your politics is that professional politicians are bad, do you have to throw yourself out the next year? If so, are we condemned forever to government by the inexperienced? By the neophyte? By an endless parade of rookies? I do not think this is what the founding fathers had in mind, but what do I know? I don’t even own a tri-cornered hat.

On the topic of disenfranchisement, are we of the Upcounty now pretty much disenfranchised? In a less pejorative sense, are we now so outnumbered by populous Germantown precincts that the chances of electing Upcounty-oriented local representation are virtually impossible? In the recent Democratic primary, there were three decidedly Upcounty candidates for the District 2 Montgomery County Council seat: Royce Hanson, Sharon Dooley, and Eddie Kuhlman. Mr. Hanson and Ms. Dooley are strong Agricultural Reserve advocates and had the support of a number of like-minded advocacy groups. Mr. Hanson collected the most votes of the three, but the combined votes of all three would not have matched the total of the eventual nominee, Craig Rice. Mr. Rice had stepped down from his state delegate seat to run for the county council and had the endorsement of his incumbent peers in the county delegation. A quick review of precincts confirms the obvious: Mr. Hanson won a few precincts out this way, but Mr. Rice steamed ahead in the more populous and down county precincts.

Is this the way of the future? Will there be no more successful Upcounty candidates like Jean Roesser, Jean Cryor, and Nancy Dacek? I realize that the party affiliation issue is working here as well, but that was once surmountable for strong, capable, centrist candidates such as these, and Royce Hanson got defeated in his primary. Lest I appear to be oversimplifying this point and not giving Mr. Hanson his due, it should be noted that he is well known and respected across the entire county and was far more than a local-interest candidate, but he was clearly not a Germantown candidate.

Republican Party nominee Robin Ficker will carry the Upcounty banner against Mr. Rice, but I haven’t read or heard anything that suggests he was going to make it close, although if those green “Robin Ficker Term Limits” road signs could vote, I think he might have given Mr. Rice a run for his money.

There are issues of concern out our way that may not be evident to the casual voter east of Seneca Creek. It will be increasingly incumbent upon us, and perhaps more difficult, to exert our influence upon the politicians who can get elected in our districts. We will have to influence them because it doesn’t look like any of our more Upcounty-focused candidates are going to be able to squeak through occasionally, as they did before. It will be an educational process, and it may take time to bring some of them up to speed. Throwing them out every election might not be the answer.