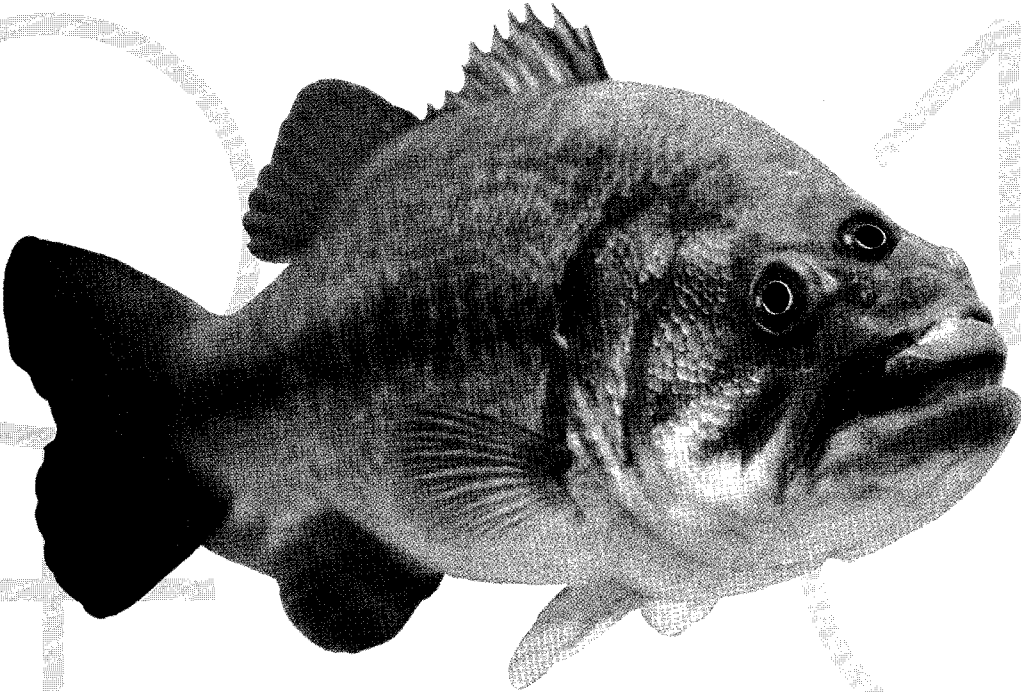
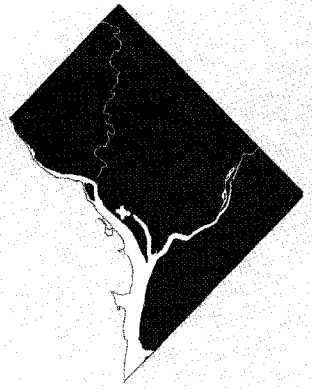


Ten Miles Square

"...such district (not exceeding ten miles square)...[shall] become the seat of the government of the United States." – THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES



"Abnormally developed fish, possessing both male and female characteristics, have been discovered in the Potomac River...raising alarms that the river is tainted by pollution that drives hormone systems haywire. The fish, smallmouth and largemouth bass, are naturally males but for some reason are developing immature eggs inside their sex organs... [Representatives] at area utilities said there was no evidence that tap water taken from the Potomac was unsafe to drink." – The Washington Post, September 6, 2006

POTOMAC SPRINGS CORPORATION



Potomac River Plaza
Washington, D.C.

11-13-2006

Dear Mr. Tropboire,

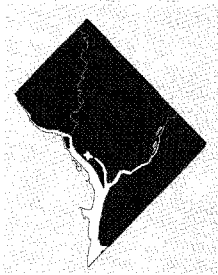
We are in receipt of your letter of Nov. 9 in which you complain of symptoms that you connect to water processed at our

utility company. While we understand your surprise at having developed a large pair of breasts with fully functioning mammary glands, we can assure you our researchers have found no conclusive link between your symptoms and consumption of Potomac River water, a beverage of the highest caliber.

In addition, yes, we have read reports

of intersexed fish but must say we find bass to be among the least credible species of the fish group. We see no profit in entertaining their case.

We understand that your wife has had complaints as well, especially over the unwelcome forest of chest hair, but let us assure you: God could not have designed a body of water more richly suited for drinking than that of the Potomac. We



feel that sometimes the best palliative for any ailment is to have a tall glass of its cool, restorative freshness.

Best wishes,
Potomac Springs Corporation

POTOMAC SPRINGS CORPORATION



Potomac River Plaza
Washington, D.C.

2-14-2007

Dear Mr. Tropboire,
Congratulations. We're delighted to hear you're expecting, and we see no reason for concern. Think of sea-horses. We'd ask if the baby-to-be is a boy or girl, but labels are confining.

You write that you feel lingering doubts over water quality in the Potomac River, and your feelings are completely understandable. The world can be confusing. So many of us develop the odd breast or ovum, and it's nat-

ural that we go looking for answers. But you won't find them in the Potomac, which, truly, is heaven's gift to water drinkers. With its proximity to the nation's capital, its heady bouquet, and its rich amber color, this is river water for the true river-water connoisseur.

As for your wife's prostate, if it causes her no discomfort, we recommend leaving it alone.

Best wishes,
Potomac Springs Corporation

POTOMAC SPRINGS CORPORATION



Potomac River Plaza
Washington, D.C.

12-21-2007

Dear Mr. Tropboire,
Thank you for your letter. Congratulations on the successful deliv-

ery of your baby human, and we're delighted that you have chosen to breast feed. Every bump has a silver lining, as we like to say at Potomac Springs Filtering.

We did not see the need for your intemperate language, though, and feel that the "Three-Mile Island toilet" epithet was especially hurtful, given the pride we take in our product. Yes, we know about the recent extinction of Potomac bass. Frankly, we view it as an act of suicide in an asymmetrical war waged against us.

On that note, we hope you'll sample our new line of Potomac River ice, beautiful in its luminescence and indispensable in a power outage. Whether you're a man, woman, or Washingtonian, you'll be sure to enjoy the thirst-quenching, flavorful properties of the best the Potomac has to send downriver.

Best wishes,
Potomac Springs Corporation

- By T.A. Frank



THE WASHINGTON MONTHLY'S MONTHLY JOURNALISM AWARD

Matt Lauer, NBC News
"Today"
September 11, 2006

David Gregory, NBC News
White House press conference
September 15, 2006

This month, *The Washington Monthly* breaks with tradition by honoring two television journalists, Matt Lauer and David Gregory, both of NBC News. Presidential interviews are always tricky. When they cover a topic like U.S. policy on interroga-

tion of detainees—and when the interviewee is as averse to being challenged as President Bush—they are that much more so. Lauer, in an exclusive one-on-one Oval Office interview, and Gregory, at a presidential press conference, both performed admirably, doggedly grilling President Bush, then aggressively following up on the president's evasions. As Congress prepares to legalize torture, the performance of many in the press, led by Lauer and Gregory, has been a rare cause for comfort.

Politics 101

The meaning of the midterms.

By Paul Glastris

Off-year elections are murky affairs. Most Americans don't pay attention to them. Even fewer vote in them. And their political significance must be discerned, oracle-like, from the results of hundreds of House and Senate races, most of which turn as much on local as national issues.

Still, once the returns are in, a roughly accurate consensus usually forms about the meaning of a particular midterm. In 1994, the GOP took control of both houses of Congress for the first time in over 40 years. That rout was widely seen as a rejection of sclerotic and uninspired Democratic congressional rule, a rebuke of the shaky first two years of Bill Clinton's presidency, and a sign that a growing portion of the electorate was open to conservative ideas. In 1998, the Senate held steady and the Democrats picked up five House seats. That result—the first time since 1822 that the party not in control of the White House had failed to gain seats in the mid-term election of a president's second term—was understood as a protest against impeachment inquiries then underway against a by-then-popular Clinton. In 2002, the Democrats lost their paper-thin Senate majority along with seven House seats. In that case, too, the message was clear: The public wasn't impressed with tremulous Democrats who, 14 months after 9/11, only wanted to talk about prescription drugs.

While midterms offer important lessons, politicians don't always learn them. After 1994, Bill Clinton got it right: He retooled his staff, reembraced New Democratic ideas like welfare reform, and won big in 1996. After the 1998 midterms, by contrast, GOP House leaders ignored the message voters were sending and impeached the president anyway, a move now widely seen, even by many conservatives, as a mistake. And after 2002, Democrats waited another year—for Iraq to descend into chaos and for presidential candidate Howard Dean to show them how to fight—before challenging the GOP on national-security grounds.

This year's midterms are at least as crucial as the last three, and already it is possible to predict how their results will be read, and misread. In a nutshell, if Democrats win, both parties will likely learn the right lessons. But if Republicans win, both

parties are liable to take away the wrong lessons.

"Had Enough?"

Consider the former possibility: that Democrats take the House, and possibly the Senate. Many conservatives are already so openly disgusted with the behavior of House Republicans—the spending, the corruption, the failure to stand up to the White House on civil liberties and separation of powers—that it will be hard for any Republican leader to credibly argue that a midterm loss is anything but a rebuke for that same behavior.

Democrats, meanwhile, are unlikely to read too much significance into their win. After three straight election losses and endless rounds of self-flagellation, few Democratic leaders are under the illusion that they have a master plan for political success or the ideological key to voters' hearts. Should they take back one or both houses, Democrats will feel not so much triumphant as relieved to finally be back in the game.

Now consider the other possibility: that the GOP manages to hold on to its majorities in the House and Senate. In that case, Republicans, led by the president, will want to claim even the thinnest victory as public validation of everything they've been doing over the past six years. One glance at the opinion polls—on the economy, Iraq, you name it—is enough to show that this isn't true. But you can safely bet a month's pay that this is precisely what GOP leaders will do.

And if they do, they will be repeating the mistake Bush made two years ago. After narrowly winning reelection in 2004, the president claimed he had faced his "accountability moment," and not only didn't need to change course but could now spend his "political capital" on such radical endeavors as privatizing Social Security. A year later, Bush's approval ratings were in the 30s and vulnerable GOP candidates were avoiding his presence.

Democrats, too, are liable to miss the real lesson of a failure to win at least one house. Egged on by their "friends" in the mainstream media, Democrats may come to believe that their mistake was one of message: They didn't offer up enough bold ideas, an alternative vision to contrast with the Republicans'.

It's true that Democrats have a message problem in the most profound sense: They don't quite know, and certainly can't get across to voters, what they stand for or where they'd

Paul Glastris is editor in chief of *The Washington Monthly*.