

IN A RECENT news conference, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco) said that although she claims to watch Comedy Central's satirical pundit show "The Colbert Report" "all the time," she "wouldn't recommend that anyone go on the show." Her advice to other members of Congress: "Don't subject yourself to a comic's edit unless you want to be made a fool of."

Last month, Rep. Robert Wexler (D-Fla.) seemed to prove her point when Stephen Colbert convinced him to make outlandish statements on camera. Among other things, Wexler said (prompted to do so by Colbert): "I enjoy cocaine because it's a fun thing to do."

That was probably going a bit too far. But I had a very different experience on "The Colbert Report" when I appeared as part of its "Better Know a District" series. Did Colbert make a fool of me? Absolutely. But, to tell you the truth, the "Better Know a District" segment was one of the best appearances I've made as a congressman.

You may find this shocking, but not many people know much about Nebraska's 2nd Congressional District (including some of our residents). Doing the show was a way to put a face, and a joke, to my name -- and a way for my constituents to see me in something other than an opponent's 30-second attack ad.

More important, the rest of the country learned a little something about the Fighting 2nd. Now everyone in the nation (who has seen the show) knows that Omaha is home to one of the country's biggest telecommunications centers, as well as the tower at First National Center, the tallest structure between Minneapolis and Denver! (OK, it sounded more impressive on TV.)

First as a city councilman and now as a congressman, I have been interviewed on numerous television shows, and yet I've never had as many people (i.e., potential voters) approach me on the street as I have since my appearance on "The Colbert Report."

As for subjecting myself to a comic's edit, I would much rather have my words taken out of context by Colbert than by the "real" media. At least with Colbert, the context is clearly comedy and the audience gets it. I'm not sure Pelosi does.

I'm following a proud tradition of politicians making jokes at their own expense. In 1968, Richard Nixon appeared on the TV show "Laugh-In" while running for president. His opponent, Hubert Humphrey, turned down an invitation to appear. He lost. That's something members of Congress might want to keep in mind with the midterm elections around the corner.

Pelosi wants the Democrats to take over the House this fall, but she's afraid to take on a comedian? Does this mean Republicans have a better sense of humor than Democrats? Aren't Democrats supposed to be the ones who can laugh at themselves?

Thus, here is my modest bipartisan proposal: Resolved, that all members of Congress put aside their political differences and let Stephen Colbert make fun of both parties equally.

Moreover, to anyone who suggests that Colbert had anything to do with this editorial, I'm offended. And Stephen says he is too.

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