

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Our state’s sending the wrong message

Who says the world has to make sense? Because if it did, the State of Kansas wouldn’t be buying \$14 million worth of Homeland Security supplies from a single New Hampshire contractor.

Fire chiefs have complained that they can’t buy from Kansas suppliers. The New Hampshire outfit, Fisher Safety, says it has contracts to supply emergency equipment to 14 states.

Apparently, Kansas officials wanted a single-source contract and didn’t try to find local vendors, because it was easier and quicker.

Capt. Mark Bruce, director of emergency operations for the Kansas Highway Patrol, told a legislative committee last week that Fisher allows a “one-stop shop” for fire departments and emergency management agencies using the grant money.

Bruce said the contract’s “large-volume efficiencies” allow the smallest department to get the same price as the largest.

He noted that Fisher will buy about 30 percent of the equipment, \$4.2 million worth, from Kansas suppliers which include Nex-Tech in Lenora. While that is laudable, that leaves \$9.8 million going out of state.

Officials said agencies can use an in-state bidder if the price is the same or less, but the program is not set up to actually encourage that.

You’d think state officials would have more sense, but apparently not. You’d think they’d have a marked preference for buying from taxpayers who support them, but apparently not.

Next thing you know, they’ll be contracting to have welfare calls answered in India.

Oops.

They already tried that.

No, Kansas government has no faith in or loyalty to Kansas taxpayers. From call centers to drivers licenses to fire and emergency equipment, it sees no value at all in shopping with those who pay the bills.

And surely there are plenty of tax-paying businesses who can supply these needs, even if the cost is a little more.

The Legislature needs to crack down on state purchasing. Unless we support Kansas businesses, there’ll soon be no businesses in Kansas to pay taxes or support the state.

Kansas, as the saying goes, needs to dance with the one who brung her.

And that means a strong preference for buying at home.

Steve Haynes
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Where to write

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U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1519 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorriso@ink.org web:http://www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison

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Here’s a gift to consider

The idea of designating a particular month for health, personal hygiene, hobbies, education and more is good.

It’s important for us to be reminded about issues we might overlook day-to-day and there are a lot of them. Some of the more common awareness month issues include, but aren’t limited to breast cancer, domestic violence, immunization, alcohol, national adoption, fire prevention, prostate cancer.

As a newspaper, we try to report on as many as space allows, which brings me to my point.

While going through mail the other day, I discovered an “awareness day” that I hadn’t ever run across before — *Take A Loved One to the Doctor Day*. Unfortunately, the day has already come and gone and, at first I had to admit, I thought it sounded corny.

After all when someone is sick, they see their doctor or most of us go in for yearly checkups. So why would we need a day set aside to take our loved one to the doctor.

Could you imagine taking someone you care about to a doctor and saying, “Hi! I brought my loved one here today in recognition of *Take A Loved One To The Doctor Day*? There’s nothing really wrong with them, but I thought you might like to see them anyway.”

With my luck, the doctor would write an order for me to see a psychiatrist and they would tell my loved one they are doing just fine.

I really don’t think that’s what Kansas had in mind when designating this special day, though, which incidentally was Tuesday of this week.

Seriously speaking, the reason the Kansas Department of Health and Environment encouraged participation in *Take A Loved One To the*



Patty Decker

- Deep Thoughts

Doctor Day was to focus on prevention and early detection.

That makes sense, particularly when there are people dying prematurely because they failed to see a doctor in time. Some of those preventable diseases include heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, infant mortality and others.

Reading on, the state noted that its research concluded that despite gains in life expectancy over the past century in the United States, huge gaps in health outcomes persist among ethnic groups and really all Americans.

Most of us know firsthand someone who died young either because of a heart attack, stroke, or any number of other health-related reasons.

It really hadn’t occurred to me to take from that firsthand experience about someone I knew who died and personalize it by thinking about a family member or close friend.

While it’s uncomfortable to admit, it would have been even worse if it never occurred to me at all.

I think what the state wanted to emphasize is that when we use health services regularly we can prolong and increase the quality of life.

Of course, attitudes are a tough thing to change — but imagine if someone were to break

through that kind of barrier? It would certainly change the outcome of our lives and for the better.

Although the information didn’t suggest ways to get loved ones to the doctor, I thought about a few ideas. For example, there are gift certificates for just about anything, so why not for a doctor visit? The doctor’s office could even consider a marketing approach like any other business. Christmas gift certificates good for one hearing test, ear, nose and throat exam, eye exam, blood test, massage, endurance test, dental checkup — the sky’s the limit!

Maybe we might even know someone without health insurance who could benefit from any exam. Although I hadn’t planned on making a plug for next year’s Wellness Fair, it sure would be something to think about giving to a family — maybe even just paying the admission charge for the fair, which by the way is scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 15.

Now that I am over 50, the reality of how precious life really is has slowing been changing my attitude and outlook on health issues.

The next time there’s a special occasion coming up, I am going to think long and hard about the present I buy.

Coupons from a doctor, dentist, optometrist or other health-related services would be such a great way to wish those we care about a happier birthday, anniversary or holiday.

After all, what better gift is there then helping someone to have a longer and healthier life?

Patty Decker is editor of the Free Press and certainly not getting any younger. Her column appears Thursdays.

Some advice for John Kerry

Let’s face it, fellow liberals; Commander Kerry’s Swift Boat isn’t looking too swift these days. It’s riding lower in the water even as he rides lower in the polls.

The shore is lined with people shouting advice to him: “Be tougher. Be more positive. Defend yourself faster. Don’t defend, attack. Don’t talk about so many issues. Broaden your agenda.”

Good advice all, but easier to give than to follow.

So I thought I’d try my hand at it. I figure if he uses it and it works, I might get a job in the new administration; something that comes with a big office and not many duties to do. Here are just a few things I would tell John Kerry if I had his ear:

Do not use the word “nuance.” Don’t use it in a campaign, in private conversation, or in your sleep. Your Secretary of State can use the word. So can your ambassador to the United Nations. In an emergency, your press secretary can use it (although I wouldn’t recommend it). You cannot.

People running for president do not say “nuance” unless, of course, they’re running for president of France.

In the first place, a good number of the people you’re trying to get to vote for you don’t know what it means.

In the second place, it not only sounds like a French word, it is a French word and, for better or for worse, France is not the favorite country of the American people right now. (Hey, I’m like

Donald Kaul

● Guest Commentary

you, I love the place. Great food, beautiful cities and towns, stylish women. What’s not to like? But you’ve got my vote already, you know? You might try reaching out to those with less sophisticated palates.)

Stop saying that you’ll fight a more sensitive war against terrorism. It’s OK to be more sensitive but you don’t want to talk about it. It sounds like you want to get Osama bin Laden on a couch and have him tell you his life story. I know, that’s not what you mean but it leaves you open to that kind of misinterpretation (and, as we know, if the Republicans didn’t have misinterpretation, they wouldn’t have any interpretation at all). You’re not teaching English Lit 101, John. You’re running for president. Act like it. Talk about fighting “a smarter” war on terrorism. Smart is good; smart plays in Peoria.

Never say you would still vote to authorize the president to attack Iraq even if you knew then what you know now. Never, ever. Don’t tell me you didn’t *really* say that. It sounded as though you said it and that’s good enough for the Elec-

toral College. When you said whatever it was you said, you could hear the air begin to escape the Kerry balloon. You picked a heck of a time to be nuanced on an issue. All those Dean and Kucinich voters who were stirred by the passion of their candidates suddenly became aware that you really weren’t one of them and they sagged. George Bush spends a lot of time cultivating his base, have you noticed that? You should try it sometime.

What is it with you Massachusetts politicians anyway? You, Dukakis, you run for president like you were taking your SATs. The dirty little secret of politics is that American voters like C-student candidates. That’s what most of them were when they were in school and they’re comfortable with candidates who sound like they were too. Eisenhower, Reagan, both Bushes, they were all thought to be intellectually inferior to their opponents by the liberal establishment. But they won, John, they won. You might think about that.

And, lastly, I would think about ditching that focus group you’ve been using. Where is it, Cambridge? It’s not working. (I have a confession to make. I came up with this memo six weeks ago but I forgot to mail it. Sorry. I hope it’s not too late.)

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