



Free Press Viewpoint

Fairness matters between elections

The decision of how to fill the late Sen. Ted Kennedy’s seat has brought up a very important point, how do we choose our replacement leaders? Massachusetts law stated that a general election had to be held within 145 days to choose a successor. However, the state’s Democrat-dominated legislature voted to change the law to let the governor, also a Democrat, appoint someone to fill in before then. This has been taken by some as an attempt to subvert democratic process to keep the 60-vote majority that the Democrats currently have in the Senate, and it probably was. There are dozens of issues coming before Congress. So how do the rest of us choose our replacement leaders? Each state has its own procedure.

Wyoming went through the process in 2007 after the death of Sen. Craig Thomas. The Wyoming process was fairly straightforward: all interested and eligible candidates had to submit their name to the state party – in this case, the Republican Party – within a certain period of time. There were more than 30 candidates. Three representatives from each county’s Republican party gathered, and each candidate was allowed a short speech. The field was narrowed to 10 and then a final three. They were all well-qualified: a doctor who had been a state senator; a former state treasurer and state representative; and the late Sen. Thomas’ former chief of staff. The three names were given to the governor, who picked the winner. That person would serve until the next general election, in which he or she could run to serve the remainder of Sen. Thomas’ term. Interestingly, on the questionnaire each candidate had to fill out – made available to the public – the candidate had to indicate whether they would run in the special election in 2008. What is also interesting in this case is that Wyoming’s governor was – and is – a Democrat. This put a Democrat in the position of picking a Republican senator that would have a strong footing in the next election. Incumbents, even appointed ones, always have an advantage unless they are extremely disliked by their constituents. The governor could also pick the weakest of the candidates submitted to him, in order to stack the deck in the next election. The governor’s choice was the doctor, Sen. John Barrasso who, as it turned out, did win the 2008 election and will serve in the Senate until 2010. The former state treasurer also went on to win election to the state’s only congressional seat in that same election. By and large the process was open, transparent and with a healthy dose of partisan politics thrown in. Not a bad way to pick a successor short of an actual election. And what they were really doing was picking a temporary senator. Massachusetts was essentially trying to change their law to this process, but at the wrong time for the wrong reasons. Massachusetts could learn a thing or two from the way we handle things out west. This kind of major decision has to be done in such a way that, even if the people don’t get to directly choose their representative, they don’t feel like they’ve had someone thrust upon them for partisan reasons. It has to be fair from start to finish so that there is no doubt or controversy surrounding the appointee. A last-minute rule change to swing it in favor of one party over another is not going to be well-received by constituents.

— Kevin Bottrell

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Steve Haynes - Publisher s.haynes @ nwkansas.com

NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor kbottrell @ nwkansas.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter aheintz @ nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor mballard @ nwkansas.com

Vera Sloan and Aubrey Spencer - Society Editors colby.society @ nwkansas.com

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Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Manager j.stewart @ nwkansas.com

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Busy life calls for new friends

It’s been another turbulent week in the newsroom. There have been sports and news stories to cover and people to interview. I think my colleagues and I started longing for the weekend as early as Wednesday morning. Every once I while I get kind of depressed when I think about all of the time I spend sitting in a chair and typing.

I hate to say it, but one of the high points of my week has been greeting my neighbor’s pit bull. I go see the dog once in a while because I miss my dog back in Kansas City and I have become sort of attached to the animal. For better or worse, there are times where I prefer to spend time with dogs instead of people. Dogs give you unconditional love and are always thrilled to see you. They are masters at living up to my expectations.

The same thing can’t be said of people. People let me down all the time. They can be cold, manipulative and cruelly indifferent to my needs and the needs of others. Even the people I respect and trust have let me down at some point in my life. I have also let them down on numerous occasions.

Dogs hardly ever let me down because they have perfected the art of being a dog. This is why people love them so much. If people loved each other the way they loved their dogs, poverty would be cut in half and everyone would have access to health care. This is probably why I can’t think about my old dog Buck without breaking down and crying.

When I was struggling with obsessive compulsive disorder during my junior year in high school, he slept on the chair next to my bed



Andy Heintz

- Wildcat Ramblings

every night. During that time I was constantly scared about irrational things that no one else could understand. Buck was one of the only reassuring things in my life.

I talked to him about stuff I wouldn’t even tell my parents, even though I knew he couldn’t understand everything I was telling him. He would usually just paw me or lick my face. But he loved me and I have trouble dealing with him being gone, even though he died several years ago and my family has a new dog named Max that I have grown quite fond of.

Lately I have been reminded that even long-time friends can let you down. During my free time, I have been busy trying to maintain a relationship with an old friend I’ve known since I was in elementary school. We played sports together from elementary school through high school. He has been one of my most loyal fishing partners. We fished together in small ponds, streams, and gigantic lakes. Together we caught channel catfish, largemouth bass, wiper, smallmouth bass, walleye, sunfish and northern pike. We had great days on the water and we had days when we got skunked.

His friendship has always meant a lot to me and I have always gone out of my way to preserve it, but over the years it has become

painfully obvious that our lives are going in different directions.

This has been depressing for me because I seem to be the only one really trying to maintain communication between the two of us. It’s hard to deal with the fact I considered our friendship more important than he did. Or maybe we both valued our friendship equally, but he thinks trying to fight change is an exercise in futility.

Whatever the reason, I know I will end up being bitter about the situation and the competitive side of my personality will want to outperform him in life as a form of payback. This isn’t rational or fair, but I’m too proud not to be bitter about any sort of rejection. But I have decided to not let myself get to down about it.

I will always have a lot of respect for my old buddy. He’s a hard worker and a good-hearted human being and I will never forget that he was the first person to come and see me when my obsessive compulsive disorder first interjected itself into my life and kept me out of school for about a week.

But this isn’t the first time and probably won’t be the last time I lost contact with old friends. Most things in life are bound to change whether I like it or not. But I hope I never allow the painful end of old relationships keep me from being open to new friendships.

That’s why I get together with my new four-footed buddy next door.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Medicare-type option doesn’t make sense

Earlier this week, I read in a Kansas newspaper the suggestion of a simple way to address health care reform – just expand Medicare, the nation’s federal insurance program that pays for health care for seniors, to cover more people as the “public option.”

This idea is supported by some in Washington and, at first glance, may appear appealing to many. Certainly, this idea seems easier to understand than other proposals that are being pushed in our nation’s capital and in the media.

Certain Democrat leaders would like the public option to function like an expanded Medicare program. However, there are major flaws with this proposal, and I do not see how it could protect and enhance care for Kansans.

Medicare is going bankrupt – The Medicare trust fund that pays for inpatient hospital stays is paying out more in benefits than it is collecting through payroll taxes. As a result, this fund is expected to be bankrupt in 2017, just eight years from now.

In all, Medicare faces overall shortfalls of nearly \$38 trillion, nearly three times current GDP levels. Government projections indicate that by 2040, our country’s major entitlement programs – Medicare, Social Security, and Medicaid – will consume the entirety of today’s budget.

Providers suffer major losses treating Medicare patients. Kansas health care providers and hospitals often must operate on razor-thin margins because they are drastically underpaid by Medicare.

And when Medicare underpays doctors and



U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran

- Capitol Notes

hospitals, the cost just shifts to private insurers. The average family in a private Preferred Provider Organization-type health plan pays an extra \$1,788 a year to compensate for Medicare underpayments. If these rates were expanded to those who currently have private insurance, many Kansas hospitals would be forced to close their doors and access to doctors and nurses in the state would be further limited.

Medicare fraud is staggering – According to the FBI, Medicare and Medicaid lose an estimated \$60 billion or more each year to fraud. This amount equals 10 percent of all health spending in the U.S.

Congress needs to address this problem in Medicare and Medicaid before creating a massive new program that would be susceptible to the same fraud.

Medicare regulations are a mess – The morass of regulations governing Medicare prevents progress and impedes doctors, nurses and other providers from efficiently caring for patients. Medicare regulations total more than 125,000 pages, roughly five times the size of IRS tax regulations.

This bureaucracy threatens quality of care

for seniors. Bureaucrats in Washington set Medicare payment rates for providers and hospitals and these rates are so low that many doctors refuse to see Medicare patients. An expansion of this regulatory mess will lead to fewer providers and diminished health care access for Kansans.

Medicare guarantees health care for seniors. But, what good does it do to have an insurance card if there is no doctor, nurse, or hospital to provide care?

Instead of expanding Medicare, Congress should address Medicare’s current challenges and consider common-sense reforms to make quality coverage more affordable and more accessible for all Americans. Medicare cannot pay all of its bills now, and the problems will be magnified exponentially if it is expanded to include another 114 million Americans.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

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

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124

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