

# Opinion

## Free Press Viewpoint

### Campaign finance reform's solution

They keep talking about campaign finance reform. They never quite get the issue settled. Anything that comes down the pike is usually a diluted piece of political trash, designed to deceive the American public.

Both Democrats and Republicans are sinners in this regard. President George W. Bush has a cash box containing \$150 million — you read that right — with which to wage a war against Sen. John Kerry, the Democratic candidate for the White House next November. Kerry's cash box has been greatly reduced by the necessity to ward off several contenders within his own party. He's now out beating the bushes — not the Bush's bushes — for more money. He'll need to just about equal the ever growing Bush bundle to even make a race of it.

So, were did Bush's millions and millions and millions of dollars come from? Beats us. And Sen. Kerry? A lot of his came from his own pocket — he's not your average working American. He's wealthy beyond description.

So, how do we handle this goofy campaign finance reform? Easy. Very, very easy. But simplicity is not the thing the Washington crowd cuddles. After all if it's too simple the American people will know how it works and that could spell trouble — for those benefiting from the windfalls and whatever else is involved.

So, here's our plan — plain and simple:  
There are 50 states.  
The candidates for the White House could raise no more than \$1 million from each state.

Math says that totals \$50 million per candidate. They could then spend those \$50 million as they see fit. In other words if Republicans view our state of Kansas as just another Republican-embedded state there would be no reason to waste their money here. So, they could take the \$1 million raised here and pump it into another state where they feel they need more presence.

Make sense?  
No, it doesn't. Too simple. Too easy for Mr. & Mrs. John Q. Public to understand, and after all they are not supposed to understand campaign finance reform legislation. No fun that way.

Something else our plan would do would greatly shorten the campaign season (and we all yell about that). And that would really test the candidates' ability to handle money to make the sum total stretch. It would give us some sense of their awareness of the importance of spending one's money wisely. And it might also give us a clue as to how they would handle the nation's budget, which, we all agree, just isn't being handled.

That's it. Our free advice.  
Fifty states, fifty million dollars.

By Tom A. Dreiling  
Free Press Publisher



### High *steaks* diplomacy

John Schlageck

• Insight

You know it's important when cattlemen take time out of their busy schedules and open their gates to Japanese visitors with the intent of showing them first hand that Kansas beef is the safest, best tasting product on the planet.

That's exactly what happened Feb. 19 when two northeastern Kansas farm and ranchers welcomed a Japanese technical team to view their operations. The visits were designed to highlight key steps of beef production and demonstrate the stringent levels of safety throughout the process. It included a close-up look at a cow/calf operation and feedlot.

Beef trade with Japan continues in limbo as officials from this Pacific Rim nation continue to register their dissatisfaction with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's handling of the recent bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) incident. Japan's agriculture minister contends the U.S. probe into the incident remains "incomplete." This critical importing country of American beef has dug in its heels and will not reconsider its ban until new proposals for tighter safeguards are presented. Japan continues to insist that the United States must test all cattle for BSE prior to processing.

In an attempt to tell the Kansas beef story, Sen. Sam Brownback helped organize the tour and accompanied the Japanese on the Kansas visit.

"It is important that consumers and international trading partners understand that America's beef producers provide the safest beef supply anywhere in the world," Brownback said.

During the first stop, Jan Lyons detailed her family's 500-head registered Angus operation south of Manhattan in Riley County. The fifth

generation ranch also has two other operations in Wabaunsee and Morris counties in the Flint Hills.

Lyons told the Japanese that their family operation was not unique, but one of many across the country.

"Sound science says we're not in danger here," she said. "We've got a tremendous story to tell that's why we've invited you here."

The Flint Hills beef producer said the only way operations like her family can continue is by producing a wholesome, safe product.

"We stand behind everything we sell as far as quality and safety," Lyons said. "We are like other U.S. producers which is unique in the world because most of our fed cattle are under 24 months of age when they are processed. All of our processed beef must be under 30 months so there is no risk or danger of BSE."

Lyons introduced Dr. David Gnad, Kansas State University veterinarian, who conducts their comprehensive herd health plan.

At the second stop on the Wickstrum Farm near Westmoreland, Larry Wickstrum emphasized the importance of careful handling and herd management. He told the Japanese his

cattle are born in the Flint Hills west of his farm, grow up there while feeding on the lush tall grass prairie and eventually wind up in the feed lots east and south of his place.

Wickstrum told the Japanese about his identification process. He said he has used cattle ID tags for more than 20 years.

"Cattle identification is very important," he said. "We must know where a calf was born, who he belonged to — it's a must to know the identity of all our cattle."

In addition to seeing the cattle close up, the Japanese visitors also handled and smelled corn silage, toured the feed mill and watched as the cattle were being fed.

Masahito Enomoto, agriculture counselor, Embassy of Japan, said he was "impressed" after spending the day viewing two Kansas cattle operations.

"We are very concerned about growing the healthy animal," Enomoto said.

"What I saw today is very impressive. I will tell my colleagues in Tokyo what Kansas people are doing in their operations and growing cattle. I like the silage smell," he said laughing.

Both Lyons and Wickstrum thanked the Japanese for touring their operations. They are convinced they helped tell these Japanese that Kansas, and American beef, is the safest, best tasting in the world.

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John Schlageck has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

### This should spook you out

Nick Nyhart

• Guest Commentary

At the end of December, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that it was banning sales of ephedra, a nutritional supplement linked to thousands of health complaints and dozens of deaths. This is good news for American consumers, especially young people who were influenced by advertising touting ephedra's value as a diet pill and energy booster. But it remains a cautionary tale about the power of money in politics. After all, even though ephedra is being removed from the market, nutritional supplement makers still don't have to prove the safety or efficacy of their products, thanks to a 1994 law backed by the industry.

Ten things you should know about the ephedra story:

Ephedra is an herb. It is the botanical kin to the compound ephedrine, a component of methamphetamine. One expert calls it "the chemical cousin of speed." Like synthetic amphetamines, it elevates heart rate and blood pressure.

The FDA banned the use of ephedrine in over-the-counter drugs in 1983. But as a naturally occurring herb, ephedra fell under the 1994 Dietary Supplements Health and Education Act, which regulates diet supplements as foods, not drugs. Unlike pharmaceuticals, companies do not have to prove supplements are safe or effective before selling them. Instead, the FDA has to prove a supplement is unsafe before it can restrict its use, and supplement makers are not required to alert the FDA when they receive consumer health complaints.

Ephedra, sometimes mixed with caffeine, was a huge hit with dieters and athletes, including many young people. Sales of products containing ephedra hit \$1.3 billion in 2002, according to "Nutrition Business Journal."

In 1997, reports of deaths, heart attacks, strokes and seizures among ephedra users prompted the FDA to propose limits on the supplement's use. State health authorities and legislators in states like Texas and California began to take similar steps. This set off a wave of political influence-buying by Metabolife, the biggest marketer of ephedra, and by other companies in the \$19 billion nutritional supplement industry.

Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) was the principal author of the 1994 law, along with Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa). They both wrote letters to the FDA questioning its handling of Metabolife. So did Rep. Brian Bilbray (R-Calif.), whose district contains Metabolife's headquarters. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, Hatch and

Harkin are the number one and two lifetime recipients in the Senate of campaign cash from the nutritional and dietary supplements sector, at \$156,950 and \$125,580, respectively. Hatch's son Scott has also been retained as a lobbyist by an industry trade association. Bilbray tops the House list of all-time recipients, at \$54,750. Overall, the industry poured \$5.5 million into federal candidates and parties' coffers from 1989 to the present, nearly \$2 million of which came from Metabolife between 1997 and 2002, when the FDA was most actively investigating ephedra. The agency backed down during that period.

In Texas in 1999, Metabolife's lobbyists blocked a move by health authorities to require a prescription for ephedra. Then-Governor George W. Bush received at least \$40,000 in contributions from Metabolife executives and lobbyists; he then intervened in the regulatory process to the company's benefit. A year later in California, then-Governor Gray Davis took \$175,000 in contributions from Metabolife around the same time that the state assembly was moving to require warning labels on products containing ephedra. Davis vetoed the bill.

In 2001, the consumer watchdog group Public Citizen asked the FDA to ban ephedra, citing voluntary reports to the agency of 81 deaths along with numerous other serious medical conditions caused by ephedra use, and noting that Canadian health authorities had just banned the substance. U.S. military authorities halted sales of ephedra products at commissaries that year, but the FDA still did not take action.

In October 2002, Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), a longtime critic of the supplement industry as well as the pharmaceutical industry, held a hearing on the dangers of ephedra. Beforehand, "Colleagues of mine in the Senate from both parties came to me and said, 'You can't do this. This is not in your jurisdiction. You ought to stay away from it,'" he later told National Public Radio. "Then they'd pull me over to the side and say quietly, 'This industry is a big supporter. They help us. A lot of their people are big Demo-

crats and, you know, you ought to think twice about this.' And I thought to myself, 'This is unbelievable.'"

In July 2002, FDA chief counsel Daniel Troy "stalled efforts to investigate complaints about ephedra," *U.S. News and World Report* later revealed. The Justice Department had offered to help the agency obtain Metabolife documents detailing more than 13,000 consumer complaints the company had received about the drug, but Troy balked. A lower-level FDA official who disagreed with him was transferred to an FDA field office. Before coming to the FDA, Troy was a lawyer for the tobacco and pharmaceutical industries. President Bush, who appointed Troy to his post, has received over \$1.1 million from those two industries for his 2000 and 2004 presidential campaigns.

Only after the ephedra-linked death of Baltimore Orioles pitcher Steve Bechler in February 2003 did Congress hold extensive hearings on ephedra's dangers. By the time the FDA finally called for its banning, at the end of December 2003, most companies had already stopped selling the product. The action came almost 10 years after medical authorities spotted problems with the substance. At least 155 deaths have been connected to its use.

Postscript: Since the FDA lacks the legal power to remove diet supplements from the market, ephedra continues to be sold on the Internet, and supplement makers may challenge the FDA's ruling in the courts. Though President Bush called for tougher controls on steroid abuse in his most recent State of the Union address, he made no mention of ephedra, which has been much more widely used. So far, there are no signs that Congress will revisit the 1994 law that allows nutritional supplement makers to sell their products without proving their safety or effectiveness.

To top things off, since 1997 Congress hasn't held a hearing on any of the thirteen pharmaceutical drugs that have been withdrawn from the market after winning FDA approval, even though they've been tied to the deaths of more than a thousand people.

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Nick Nyhart is executive director of Public Campaign, a Washington D.C.-based non-partisan, non-profit organization devoted to comprehensive campaign finance reform. This essay is taken from "OUCH!," its regular publication ([www.ouch.org](http://www.ouch.org) <<http://www.ouch.org>>).

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