

Other Viewpoints

Democrats step up on governor's ticket

Whether enough Kansans will see the Democratic ticket for governor in 2014 as the dream team, who knows at this point. But it is the best ticket the Dems have fielded since Kathleen Sebelius – a popular governor who's not so popular right now as secretary of Health and Human Services in the Obama administration – and Mark Parkinson.

Democratic candidate Paul Davis seemingly strengthened his bid for governor by making an early announcement on Tuesday of Wichita businesswoman Jill Docking as his running mate. The two did a four-city announcement tour in a school bus, reinforcing the point that public education will be one of their key issues in the 2014 campaign.

Davis alone is a solid candidate, a bright Lawrence lawyer who serves in the House as minority leader. Be that as it may, he doesn't enjoy widespread name recognition across the state. His running mate, however, brings that to the ticket.

Docking is a career financial advisor and former chairwoman of the Kansas Board of Regents. She is the wife of former Lt. Gov. Tom Docking, son and grandson of two former governors. And, more importantly, she brings good ideas and a strong voice of her own to the race. Before Davis formally announced, Docking was speculated as the candidate to be on the top of the Democratic ticket.

They will run aggressively against incumbent Gov. Sam Brownback, the reformist Republican who has plenty of positions they can attack – namely a tax plan that has eliminated income taxes for business owners and shifted more burden to the poor and middle class, and a correspondingly frugal state budget for public education and social services.

The Democrats think Brownback is vulnerable, and the latest Survey USA poll shows that he has a 58 percent disapproval rating among Kansans. And in the first gubernatorial race polling since Docking joined the Davis ticket, Survey USA showed the Democrats ahead of Brownback and Jeff Colyer 43 percent to 39 percent.

In any event, some of Brownback's policies have been controversial, and the Democrats finally have fielded a ticket that at least ought to make re-election a challenge for the Republican in a decidedly red state. And if Kansas voters tune out the campaign television commercials long enough to listen to the debate, they should discover they have a clearly different philosophical choice for governor in the November election next year.

– The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press

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Veterans remember citizens caring

In preparation for our special Veterans Day section, I had the privilege of interviewing a man who served in Vietnam.

He told me about his service, sure, but what stuck with me were his memories of how he was treated when he came home.

After sacrificing his youth to live horrors many of us can only imagine, he came home to harsh criticism. Protesters made his life difficult, and friends and neighbors he'd known his entire life would not talk to him. He remembered wearing civilian clothes as he traveled to avoid protesters.

He mentioned he was glad he hadn't been spit on, as some had.

Imagine being glad that you hadn't been spit on for doing something heroic like serving your country.

When he told me about how he goes out of his way to thank military members for their service, even thanking me for mine, I struggled to maintain my composure instead of letting tears fall. My heart broke for his experiences.

He made far greater sacrifices than I ever did, but he was treated with hatred he didn't deserve. I didn't live through that period in our history, but I imagine many others were treated the same way or even worse.

Just a few short years ago, when I was in the military, volunteers came to an airport in Maine in the wee hours of the morning to shake our hands and wish us well as we flew to Iraq. We were just passing through from Vir-



Heather Alwin

• Windblown Libertarian

ginia while our plane refueled, but they made a special effort to be there for us to make us feel appreciated.

We were also welcomed home by scores of total strangers who came to the Baltimore airport just to thank us.

These weren't paid greeters or even USO volunteers. They didn't know me or any of my fellow soldiers, but they took time out of their busy lives to come show us their appreciation.

They shook my hand, hugged me and said thank you. They had no idea what I had done while I was deployed; it was enough that I wore an honorable uniform.

Many of them wore the military hats characteristic of retired veterans. I wonder now how many were there to welcome us because they remembered a much harsher homecoming from their own military past.

Not once did anyone spit at me, yell at me or push away a friendship because I was in the military. Instead, so many strangers shook my hand, saluted me and thanked me during my five years in the Air Force that I lost count.

I did avoid wearing my uniform when I traveled, but not because of protesters or criticism. It never occurred to me that someone would try to hurt me or make me feel ashamed because of my service.

Just the opposite, in fact. I avoided the uniform because I was self-conscious about all the thanks I got when I traveled with it on.

I am humbled by the service of Americans like this Vietnam veteran who put up with so much from our country while their own lives were in turmoil.

These men had a far worse time overseas than I did, I'm sure, and they came home to a cruel reception from many.

I can do nothing to make up for that cruelty now, but I wish I could. At the very least, stories like that make me remember how blessed I was to serve when I did.

So I'd like to extend my thanks to that veteran and others on this Veterans Day. You never should have had to endure more pain on top of what the war put you through.

Thank you for your service, and thank you for making my service – and my welcome home – possible.

Heather Alwin is the society editor for the Colby Free Press and blogs at kansalife.wordpress.com. Before moving to Kansas, she was a lawyer with the U.S. Air Force. Alwin lives in Brewster with her husband and son.

Core competency faces showdown

Probably over 400 faculty from regents universities, community colleges and tech schools met at K-State – the auditorium was full.

While some discussions for basic lecture classes went smoothly, there was plenty of action in the biology sessions. The representatives had previously voted to approve requirements that microbiology labwork had to be genuine supervised labwork – twice. And twice the Board of Regent's Transfer and Articulation Committee rejected it. It was returned to Kansas biology faculty for a third time.

While there was a faculty moderator who did a good job managing the discussion and voting, the real debate was with the Transfer and Articulation Committee representative. The committee is charged with implementing the regent's "vision" of having all 100 and 200-level courses in Kansas seamlessly articulate across all Kansas institutions.

The committee representative asserted that they did not approve it before (and would not likely approve it again) because we had gone beyond just listing competencies. In specifying genuine supervised labwork, we had dictated the "mode of teaching" and thus violated "academic freedom."

The real bottom line behind this is that there are six community colleges and tech schools in Kansas that offer their microbiology lab online. While the taxpayers of Kansas have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in genuine microbiology labs with CSI-type equipment that students use to learn hands-on microbiology, these online programs offer nothing but canned computer simulations or cheap and simple Mr. Wizard kits to use at the kitchen sink each Friday

Kansas biologists overwhelmingly rejected



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

this "mode of teaching" argument. the University of California-Berkeley, San Diego, University of Minnesota, and many other high-reputation schools refuse to accept transfer science labs for exactly the same reason.

It defies commonsense to approve courses in swimming without a pool, training in welding using only a computer screen, or to graduate nurses who have never set foot in a hospital. But this is precisely the nonsense we were being coerced to accept.

KU's pharmacy program is a Kansas example that does not accept virtual lab course transfers. Because there is no distinction on a transcript whether a course is online or face-to-face (there should be) for an applicant student, KU Pharmacy phones Kansas feeder universities each year to determine if any of their chemistry labs have gone online. As a graduate program, they can restrict transfer. At the 100/200 level, we were being told that we cannot.

Kansas biologists said we had the right to specify hands-on because online cannot accomplish the competencies. You cannot learn to make sterile slides or handle bacterial media – and do it safely – without direct supervision and modern advanced equipment.

When the Transfer Committee representative pointed out that a room of computers with a faculty member present could possibly

be considered "supervised," the response was swift. Kansas faculty (one school, one vote) voted overwhelmingly to keep "supervised laboratory" in the microbiology criteria and even strengthen it to "supervised wet lab" to prevent any other interpretation.

Other real problems: 1) faculty requirements to teach at community colleges and tech schools lower than those for high school teachers, 2) three-credit hour courses offered in two weekends, and 3) why tech schools are allowed to offer any non-tech academic courses at all – we were not allowed to address.

Unfortunately the regent's vision to make all 100 and 200-level courses across Kansas fully articulate ignores the fact that a "baby" micro lab with a high school level text for training certified nursing assistants is not the same course as a major's microbiology lab preparing pre-meds and nurses. The regent's "vision" and their Transfer Committee system is designed to address student's gripes when a course does not transfer. It is not designed to maintain quality.

If they bring the microbiology labs back to us next year – for the fourth time – it will be clear that the beatings will continue until we approve fraudulent labs. Just what part of "no" (to virtual labs) do they not understand?

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail colby.editor@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the Free Press, its staff or the owners.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

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