

VIEWPOINTS

Our Opinion (Yankton Press & Dakotan):

A newspaper's brand and political tricks

Like any other business, one of the essential ingredients in creating a successful newspaper is bonding with your customers. You cultivate a level of trust with those who purchase your product, meaning they will know what to expect from you in each edition.

This is something that's hard-earned, and it is never taken lightly.

As such, we can't blame the publisher of the Dakota Dunes/North Sioux City Times for becoming upset when, just before last week's election, the Union County Republican Party put out a publication titled the "Lincoln Union County Times" that looked a lot like the actual newspaper, but its content was devoted to promoting GOP candidates and positions.

According to Dakota Dunes/North Sioux City publisher Bruce Odson, several of his readers were confused by the lookalike publication, creating what he called "mass confusion."

"We got calls saying, 'I can't believe you did that,' and I explained it wasn't us," he told the Press & Dakotan.

Odson devoted a part of the front page of last week's edition to highlight the incident and set the record straight.

He added that he believed the local party "knew that they were creating that confusion when they were sending it out."

Not so, said District 16 State Sen. Dan Lederman, who is the county party's chairman. He said the product was not a copycat publication. The name was "completely different" and had a disclaimer on it stating it was from the Union County GOP.

"I think Bruce Odson thinks people are stupid ...," Lederman told the P&D.

Given the feedback and complaints Odson said he had, one must wonder what Lederman thinks of those people.

The GOP publication was clearly intended to confuse people. No, it wasn't an exact replica, so Lederman can justify the effort in that way, but it looked close enough to the actual newspaper — using a serif font in all caps for the "Times" name and employing many of the same design elements, albeit slightly altered — that it had to be designed to closely resemble a real and

familiar publication.

Lederman has a point in that the name was different and there was a disclaimer, but this explanation is a technicality that glosses over the very important concept of branding. The brand — in this case, the nameplate — is what the readers see, day after day or week after week, and they become completely familiar with it visually. It's really no different than a logo for a soft drink or a chain store. As such, consumers might not notice the small but important tweaks that distinguish a copycat from the genuine article. That doesn't make the readers stupid; instead, it indicates in this case how effectively the real newspaper has branded itself visually. It also shows how carefully the copycat publication worked to mimic the real deal.

Lederman added that the party publication was called "Times" because it was a "name that was synonymous with newspapers." Well, so are such names as Journal, Press, Herald, Post, News, Gazette, Chronicle and Tribune. Of course, none of those titles sound like the Dakota Dunes/North Sioux City Times, which again was most certainly the point.

The faux publication's purpose in terms of its design was to function like a curveball that its creators hoped to throw by enough people to perhaps sway some votes. You can't fool all of the people all of the time, but if you can fool some of them once, on the eve of an election ...

There are probably just enough differences in the GOP publication's look — coupled with the disclaimer — that allow the makers of the copycat to legally get away with what they did. Perhaps that can be chalked up to crafty politics.

But the maneuver also willfully strays into unethical territory. It played on the market's familiarity with a local brand and tried to dress up campaign copy as real news. It was a calculated and devious ploy, and Odson has every right to be upset that his publication's brand could be mimicked in such a way.

At the very least, Lederman owes Odson and the readers of the Dakota Dunes/North Sioux City Times an apology.

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Two words that change lives

"Mommy, what is prayer?" a seven-year old girl spouted, while tugging on her mother's hand, her gaze remained fixed on me.

Fumbling for words, the mother drew a blank and turned to me with expectant eyes, waiting for an answer.

Having grown up in a family where praying was like oxygen — we had to have it — I was mystified. How does a child arrive at this age and not know about prayer?

"Well," I stammered, "it's a way of talking to God," was my worried response. "We pray out loud or in our thoughts."

Have you ever tried giving a crash course in praying? Second only to the facts of life, it was the most difficult thing I've had to explain.

Feeling totally incapable and not really knowing what I was going to say, my only hope was to pray, "Help!"

Relying on the Divine to put words in my mouth, I replied with trepidation.

"When we pray, we... we," I said, stuttering over interpreting what was foreign to her and yet so intuitive to me. With little time to waste, I fretted articulating a practice handed down from one generation of my family to the next — all without words, only actions, like genetic code, powerfully determining who we are, how we think, act and live.

As self-doubt encroached, who was I really — a sinner, a total work in progress, still wrestling with God after all these years, to teach an innocent about a most holy act?

Riding solely on the wings of faith, nothing more, I said, "We talk to God. We ask God to be with us, to help us. We put God in charge to guide us. Sometimes we thank God for big things, little things

— everything."

That was nearly eight years ago, when I was enrolled in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at a local hospital. As a CPE student, I learned and practiced how to minister to the sick and dying and their families — no matter their religious affiliation — wherever they may be — in hospitals, care centers or in their own homes.

In this case, I was tending to pre-operation patients, and this youngster was about to have her

tonsils out.

After asking the mother if I could pray over her child, she agreed. I bowed my head and with closed eyes asked God to cover the little one and her family with God's unwavering grace, to place a hedge of protection around them now and evermore, to give them strength and courage and faith. Amen.

Strangely since those predawn hours, that question, "Mommy, what is prayer?" continues to call.

Still puzzling, I understand there are many who don't share in this spiritual resource eternally at our disposal.

In the U.S. alone, surveys reveal the number of people who say prayers on a regular basis; including saying grace before meals is dwindling. Even so, this centuries-old practice still is touted as a method of coping.



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Whether we express a simple "Now I lay me down to sleep..." utterance of gratitude recalled from a rote childhood memory or read a Psalm, praying can give us much needed perspective on life, including simple prayers, like...

Make me patient.

Give me faith.

Help me do a good job.

Give me a fresh perspective.

Give me a break.

While volumes have been written on the power and importance of prayer, thirteenth century philosopher and theologian, Meister Eckhart puts it simply, "If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."

As the holidays approach, beginning with Thanksgiving, a day we set aside to show gratitude, many of us proceed with anxiety over the co-mingling of stress and joy at this time of year.

In all of the hustle and hassle of the coming weeks, I am praying for you. May you be a recipient and deliverer of these most profound and potentially life-changing words, "Thank you," two words that just might be an answer to prayer.

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A resident of Southeast South Dakota, Paula Bosco Damon is a national award-winning columnist. Her writing has won first-place in competitions of the National Federation of Press Women, South Dakota Press Women and Iowa Press Women. In the 2009, 2010 and 2011 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contests, her columns have earned eight first-place awards. To contact Paula, email boscodamon.paula@gmail.com, follow her blog at my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on Facebook.

Guest Commentary:

Counting our blessings

By Senator John Thune

The passing months have highlighted some of the country's deep divides and overwhelming challenges. As the end of the year approaches, it is important to pause and give thanks for the many blessings that come with living in this great country.

The national celebration of Thanksgiving reminds each of us to set aside our frustrations, worries, and problems, and instead take time to express gratitude for the good fortune in our lives. We are thankful for the exceptional service of our brave troops around the world, who protect our nation from foreign and domestic threats. We are thankful to live in a country where we can freely worship our Creator, speak our minds without fear, and enjoy the freedom that is the cornerstone of our society. And perhaps most of all, we are thankful for the blessings of family, for the support of our communities, and for the

fellowship of our friends and neighbors.

South Dakotans not only speak words of gratitude, but also express gratitude through their acts of goodwill and charity. In communities across the state, fundraisers are held for families experiencing tough times, neighbors offer a helpful hand with errands, and food drives and Thanksgiving dinners are provided for those who are in need of a warm meal and friendship. The selfless acts of those around us make each of us thankful that South Dakota is the place we call home.

As the year draws to a close, I am thankful for my wonderful family and the opportunity to continue to serve our state in the U.S. Senate. The new year will be filled with challenges, but it will also be filled with the promise for many great blessings. Kimberley and I wish all South Dakotans and their families safe travels and a very blessed Thanksgiving.

Guest Commentary:

Honoring our nation's veterans

By Senator Tim Johnson

This year we saw the welcome return of over 500 South Dakota National Guardsmen who had deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation New Dawn. These men and women join the more than 72,000 veterans that call South Dakota home. Residents in communities across the state turned out to show their support in welcome home parades and ceremonies.

This Veterans Day, communities will again gather together to honor those who have served in our country's military. As we celebrate this holiday, we not only honor the recently returned National Guard veterans but all those who have worn our nation's uniform and sacrificed so much in service to our country.

With the recent passing of Senator McGovern, we're reminded again of the valor of the Greatest Generation. As a young pilot, George flew 35 B-24 Liberator missions over Europe. When his plane was struck by enemy fire, he adeptly crash-landed it, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal. While his actions were certainly heroic they were not unique. There were countless men and women like him that bravely answered the call to serve, placing themselves into harm's way and enduring unimaginable hardships. More World

War II veterans die every day, but their contributions to our country's history will never be forgotten.

A common characteristic among veterans across the generations is humility. I can't tell you the number of times I've thanked a veteran for their service and their response has been, "I'm no hero; I was just doing my job." When they make these humble remarks, these men and women aren't acknowledging that their work is something that in the past decade only one half of 1% of the population was willing to do. They aren't recognizing that their job pulls them away from their families and puts them in dangerous situations, all so that we may live safely in America and the freedoms we hold dear may be preserved. If there was ever reason to be a little boastful, this would be the time.

With this modest attitude, our veterans may not ask for extra benefits, attention, or praise, but they are deserving of all that and more. I have used my role in the Senate to be a champion for veterans' issues, securing strong funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs and working to make sure we honor the promises made to our servicemembers and stand by them when they take off our nation's uniform. I will continue this effort and hope you will join me in honoring our nation's veterans, not just on Veterans Day but every day.

Guest Commentary:

Honoring our nation's heroes

By Rep. Kristi Noem

One of the greatest honors I have had as South Dakota's lone representative is to help send off and welcome home the brave men and women of our military. Every time I participate in an activation or a welcome home ceremony, I am reminded just how blessed we are to have so many individuals voluntarily put themselves in danger to protect the freedoms we hold so dear.

Over 72,000 veterans call South Dakota home, and this Veterans Day is an opportunity to say "thank you." Because of these men and women and the countless courageous patriots that came before them, South Dakotans can continue to wake up in the greatest, most free nation in the world.

That's why it is so important to treat our veterans with the honor and respect they deserve. I have supported legislation that assists veterans in transitioning back to civilian life by providing them with quality health care, education assistance and job development skills. We must keep veterans a top priority,

and I intend to continue doing just that in Congress.

I hope every South Dakotan from Sioux Falls to Rapid City will take time to thank a veteran this Veterans Day for the sacrifices they made for us. In addition, there are a number of events occurring across the state to honor our veterans. I plan to attend a Veterans Day program in Watertown, and I encourage South Dakotans to attend a local event in their community or go to a nearby VA facility to visit with a veteran.

Our veterans are heroes, and I want to thank each and every one who has answered the call to serve. My office stands ready to assist veterans with any problems they are having with the federal government. Whether they need assistance with benefit claims or need a replacement set of military medals, I encourage veterans to contact one of my offices so we can help. Those needing assistance should visit my website at <http://noem.house.gov> for more information.

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