

Dear Editor:

I have said this before, but when I visit a coffee shop, restaurant, the barber shop, or a ballgame, I hear people say they want a better and stronger economy in southwest Nebraska. Yet often when called upon to help the community improve, we fail to act. What we do speaks so loudly others can't hear what we are saying.

We want more jobs, more opportunities, we want to maintain and improve the quality of life in southwest Nebraska. However, are we part of the problem or part of the solution when we leave southwest Nebraska for our goods and services? How many of us expect local business to meet our needs, yet we fail to support our local businesses?

When was the last time Nebraska Furniture Mart or Plum Creek Motors sponsored your daughter's soccer team or the Kearney Medical group paid taxes to support our local schools, police, street department or the senior center? When did Westroads or Menards make a donation to the McCook Community College Foundation, the hospital or nursing home? Where were the outlet malls in Colby and Greeley when we needed to rally to rebuild the lives of those whose homes were destroyed by fire?

When we fill our tank in Wray to save three cents a gallon, did we get a donation from the station to support our YMCA, the Boy Scouts, or SWATs? When we shelled out city sales tax in North Platte for the same items we get at a local mom and pop store, our local Penney's auto dealers, Wal-Mart, or Sears, did we realize we are helping them provide their own resources to help recruit businesses away from Nebraska? When we order from QVC channel or the Internet, do we receive help from them in supporting the county fair, our ambulance service, the Humane Society or the Community Concert Series?

If architects, engineering firms and stockbrokers from Lincoln and Omaha are hired to work in our town, when they leave do they leave donations to 4-H Clubs, the cheerleaders, the McCook Toy Box, Coat Closet, food pantry or the United Way? When a collection was taken to lobby the Unicameral to keep the Work Camp and its 100 jobs in southwest Nebraska or the Ag College in Curtis or build a new events center at McCook Community College, local businesses and individuals stepped up to the plate, not the mail order catalog companies.

As individuals and as businesses, if the cost and quality are comparable and we can get our goods and services in our area, we should get our goods and services in our area. If local merchants don't have what you want, ask them to order it in. We must support those who support us.

What we do speaks so loudly others can't hear what we are saying. No one controls our destiny but ourselves. We cannot look to Lincoln or Washington to help improve the quality of life here. What is most important in our lives does not happen at the Statehouse or the White House but rather in our house. We cannot expect our neighbors to shoulder the burden while we contribute little or nothing. Nor can we just hope for divine intervention. For if we desire our community to improve, each one of us must do our part.

When we buy outside our trade area, we hurt those within our trade area. Saying, "I must do something," will always solve more problems than saying, "Something must be done." To paraphrase John Kennedy—"Here in southwest Nebraska, God's work must truly be our own."

There are many excuses for failing to participate in making our area an even better community. We can rationalize that we are only one person or one family. And the time we could donate or the dollars we spend out of town won't make a difference. But they do.

The impact of 100 people doing just one percent more is better than one person doing 100 percent more. What one person does to help does make a difference.

The paper you are reading this in would not be available without local support. The goods and services we purchase here might make the difference in keeping a business open which provides jobs for your family, friend or neighbors, so they in turn can support your business.

However, some will still scoff and say, "We are just fine the way it is." They will say there is no reason to change. They will summarily dismiss the call to sacrifice or make more of a contribution. "Things are all right," they say. Well, excuses are the nails in the house of failure. A community is like a maple tree—if it isn't growing, it is dying. If we are not getting better, we are getting behind.

Many of us probably can remember the weed bare path to the outhouse, the wasps in the summer and the cold drafts in the winter. Times have changed. Not many of us have experienced the joys of the privy for several years. Time was once when the Bureau of Reclamation, the oil fields and the railroads were flurries of activities. Time have changed. Once our telephones were party lines and the operator we visited with was our neighbor working at the phone company downtown. Now we use cellular phones and the phone company jobs don't exist any longer. Times have changed.

While we maintained basically the same practices that promoted growth in the past, other successful regions have adapted. Other regions have a shared vision. They have plans to achieve their goals. They have developed resources, both human and financial, now needed to be competitive. They look beyond what might be comfortable now for what will be successful for the future.

Times have changed. Young or old, rich or poor, farmers or city dwellers, we must all make sacrifices and all do our fair share. If we always do what we always did, no longer will we always get what we always got.

Times have changed. To maintain and improve upon quality of life we all cherish here, we must be willing to take some calculated risks. Don Huiet, the producer of the Emmy winning TV program, "60 Minutes," said, "I don't know the formula for success, but I do know the formula for failure—rest on your laurels."

Southwest Nebraska is a great area. Signs of growth are abundant—Army Reserve/National Guard facility, the Kiplinger Arena and the hospital expansions. But as progressive as these projects might be, we cannot rest on our laurels. These successes are still not enough to keep us from losing population, the schools from losing enrollment, or southwest Nebraska from losing jobs and opportunities.

We must build upon distinct strengths. Other communities can boast of friendly people, city parks, and low crime rates, but few communities can point to local support the way we do.

As a community we can ban together and let what we do speak as loudly as what we say. We can voluntarily put our money "Where our mouth is." We can take a first step in community growth and change. We can become masters of our own destiny, not victims of fate. We can invest in ourselves by investing in our community.

By making an effort to embrace change, not reject it, to secure our goods and services locally rather than just talking about community improvement, each of us can start letting what we do speak as loudly as what we say.

This holiday season give yourself and your community a Christmas present by shopping at home. Support those that have a history of supporting us!

Merry Christmas,

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McCook