

King County Elections

From: Busick, Michael
Sent: Thursday, October 12, 2006 1:32 PM
To: Keith Ervin
Subject: RE: Slow news day again?

Somehow I guess I would have expected the first response from you to be longer than the second one. :)

Yes, there were problems in 2002 and 2004. I'm not arguing that. I was not here in 2002, but I was here in the fall of 2004. As a temp then, I was barely involved. I did work the phone bank when the new primary hit the streets and you can imagine how much fun I had getting those calls. :)

I also worked both recounts. More than a few people I can think of around here, I had a blast because I viewed it in its historical context. This was/is the kind of thing I can tell my kids (or even grandkids) about. It used to impress some people when I told them I worked for Wizards of the Coast at the height of the Pokemon craze, but that fad has diminished to the point that some people are like, "Who? What?" so I don't tell those stories anymore.

I didn't see fraud and I didn't see mistakes, but obviously there were mistakes (fraud was unproven in that Kittitas court decision and I agree with that decision) and changes were made. Those changes, I believe, were positive because King County Elections did win a national award for our performance in 2005 and I haven't heard of anything out of the ordinary so far this year. By "ordinary" I mean given the population of this county, the number of absentee voters and the short amount of time between election day and certification.

So many people I talk to on the phone and at the counter here refer to the 2004 election as "last time" even though we've had about 10 elections (albeit smaller) since then.

How much fun can anyone have at their job when the appearance is you're only as good as your last mistake? :)

To that end, it's a bit disheartening to read articles like yours and the one a short while ago from Sharon about how slow things are being done to insure accuracy. Maybe criticism isn't intended, but given how often this department makes the paper whenever (it seemed, anyway) Dean Logan sneezed -- and then would be criticized for it, you should understand what the first reaction would be from many of the people that work here.

The answer to the "turning the corner" question for this department will probably never be answered sufficiently in October of any given year. :)

Like I said, check back in December and see if Buck's absence adversely affected us. He had his planned before he was asked to fill in and for the sake of his mental -- and physical health to some degree -- if everyone else does their job properly, he should be able to take a vacation.

I believe Logan went on record as saying your June article was the last straw and that's unfortunate and I would've thought it might have prevented you from writing a virtually identical article just four months later about his temporary replacement.

If Buck had been here all year, I can almost guarantee he would not have chose this time to take a vacation. I'm still trying to imagine when I had a weekend off (I think it was about a month ago) and I'm nobody's supervisor. :) To those of us that have been here for a while, it's a foregone conclusion a lot of things outside of work are sacrificed during election cycles and again, there could be as many as six of those each year.

As for the choice between postponing the vacation and not taking the interim job, that might be a question better directed at him personally, because I can't speak to that. I can only imagine how much work is involved in planning a European vacation and then trying

to postpone it for a later date when it wouldn't run into another election cycle.

I believe it's a safe bet if he keeps this job (or if he's officially given the job, however it works), he won't take this kind of trip again around this time of year.

From what I've heard about Sherrill Huff Menees -- and what I know about her by working with her -- I don't see any reason why things couldn't continue as normal while Buck is on vacation, so this story in today's paper is/should be a non-issue -- in my opinion. :)

Thanks again for writing back.

Michael Busick

-----Original Message-----

From: Keith Ervin [mailto:kervin@seattletimes.com]
Sent: Thursday, October 12, 2006 12:04 PM
To: Busick, Michael
Subject: RE: Slow news day again?

Thanks, Michael.

I knew this article wouldn't be welcomed by at least some elections workers. Another elections employee contacted me prior to publication and offering the opinion that it would be demoralizing if the story ran.

This worker was convinced that Jim Buck would not have left if he felt it would jeopardize the election. I do not doubt that Jim felt that way.

I appreciate your point that managers of other divisions in King County take vacations all the time and we don't report on them. True. I felt there were a number of factors that made this different. First of all, the Elections Section has been legitimately in the news because of serious performance shortcomings in the 2002 and 2004 elections, the repeated turnover of top management, and the question that remains in the mind of many voters and newspaper readers: Has this agency turned the corner and truly gotten its house in order?

Given the greater interest in elections management than in, say, the recorder's office or Superior Court administration, there was one other factor that I thought made this newsworthy. Elections is a highly seasonal business. Although there are indeed four or more elections every year, the most complex ones are the primary and general elections. These are the ones where the challenges are greatest and in many ways the stakes are highest. A former elections manager, Ellen Hansen, said she would never go away during the primary and general election season, workers under her wouldn't, and she doesn't think they should today. She may be right or wrong, but this was based on her experience in the trenches. Evelyn Arnold, the Chelan County auditor, told me she has sometimes taken vacations of up to one week in October, but only because of a sick parent or an important meeting out of town, and only if she is confident everything is in order in her office -- and even so, she checks in frequently by phone to troubleshoot any potential problems.

It may truly be that KC Elections is now so well run that the director's absence will have little or no effect on operations. I honestly don't know whether that's true; I hope that it is. But the sense I was getting from other election professionals was that it was unusual, if not unheard of, for an auditor or elections director to be out of town for three weeks in the immediate run-up to a general election.

I wouldn't report on the vacation of, say, the prosecuting attorney or the County Council's chief of staff if there weren't a history of management problems. But consider a situation where the history is a little closer to that of Elections: The county had a \$39 million project in the late 1990s to replace the aging the payroll and financial accounting systems. The project collapsed because the project was difficult and it wasn't well-managed. The money was all spent and only a small part of the project was completed. It's been put on hold for six years while management figures out how to do it right. When that job is restarted, at a cost of at least \$70 million, we'll be keeping an eye on it. If I received word that the project manager was leaving town for an extended period at the most critical phase of the project, I would probably feel an obligation to report it.

I want you to know I'm not picking on Elections in order to embarrass Elections. It is true I have reported twice this year on absences of REALS directors. The only reason either absence was news was because of timing. When the other elections worker called me

the other day to ask that I not write about Jim Buck's vacation because it would hurt employee morale, my response was that I was sorry that might be true but there wouldn't have been a story if Jim had chosen either to decline his appointment as interim director or to move his vacation to a different time.

That's some of the thinking that went into whether this was a story. I do feel bad when my stories cause pain, as this one has done, but I felt it needed to be reported.

Best wishes,
Keith

-----Original Message-----

From: Busick, Michael [mailto:Michael.Busick@METROK.C.GOV]
Sent: Thursday, October 12, 2006 11:23 AM
To: Keith Ervin
Subject: RE: Slow news day again?

I'm written my share of letters to the editor. Both local papers. It's good to vent once in a while. :)

My opinion, since you asked, is that if the department/business/company is running like it's supposed to do, no one is supposed to be able to notice when a boss takes a vacation.

Why make people believe something is going to go wrong here (because a boss is taking a vacation) when there's a very good chance (check the internet or the King County website for a recent article stating that our Elections department won an award for our performance in 2005 WITH Dean Logan as the boss) that it won't?

If you're going to do this to us, it's only fair that you print a similar article every single time a King County department's boss (or any other major company's boss) takes a vacation during their busier time of the year, correct?

As for my earlier comments regarding "trash" and "hack", I have to be honest and say that I haven't read all of your articles, but after reading these recent two, my opinion of you and your work (which is at least supposed to appear objective, right?) isn't very high right now, though, it's not your job to impress me.

I just don't think your recent articles are making my job any easier and I'd like to think that wasn't your intent.

Once (your June article about Dean's "mysterious" vacation) could be considered an innocent mistake/misunderstanding.

Twice borders on a hatchet job.

Wait for the post-election results from the canvassing board and THEN write an article about how we might have been affected by a vacation of our interim boss.

Deal?

Thanks for taking the time to reply.

Michael Busick
Voter Services

-----Original Message-----

From: Keith Ervin [mailto:kervin@seattletimes.com]
Sent: Thursday, October 12, 2006 10:41 AM
To: Busick, Michael
Subject: RE: Slow news day again?

Michael Busick,

Thanks for writing.

I'm sorry my article was so disturbing to you.

You are certainly entitled to your opinion my stories are pieces of trash and that I am a hack.

You are entitled to your opinion that the REALS director's absence in the weeks leading up to the general election isn't newsworthy.

As a reporter, not an opinion writer, I don't think it's my place to say when it's most appropriate for the director to take a three-week vacation. It's a question for others to answer. What is your opinion?

If our editorial writers choose to offer their opinion on the question, I welcome their input, whatever their conclusion. I would also suggest you feel free to write a letter to the editor.

Keith Ervin

-----Original Message-----

From: Busick, Michael [mailto:Michael.Busick@METROK.C.GOV]
Sent: Thursday, October 12, 2006 9:55 AM
To: Keith Ervin
Cc: Jim Vesely
Subject: Slow news day again?

First you write this piece of trash:

<http://archives.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/texis.cgi/web/vortex/display?slug=logan08m&date=20060608&query=Dean+Logan>

And then you got slapped down by an unnamed co-worker who wrote this:

<http://archives.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/texis.cgi/web/vortex/display?slug=deaned14&date=20060614&query=Dean+Logan>

Today, undaunted and obviously bored with your job, you write this piece of trash:

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2003300502_buck12m.html

Why?

Did somebody else get the feature story on the prankster that dressed up the "Waiting For The Interurban" Statue?

First of all, Logan didn't quit. He resigned. And he didn't just "take a job in Los Angeles", he's the #2 guy in their elections office (the county and the office are bigger than this one).

Aspiring actresses take "jobs in Los Angeles".

Essentially, he's been promoted, but the fact that you knew that (unless you don't read the paper you work for) and didn't mention it implies some kind of ulterior motive that doesn't serve well someone in your line of work.

Are your supervisors asleep at their desks over there? Today's article isn't any more newsworthy than your earlier article.

It's obvious -- especially given that you apparently didn't learn your lesson from the June 14th editorial -- that you're just trying to stir up trouble that the elections office doesn't when we're trying to get their work done without having to be second-guessed by a hack who doesn't remotely understand the jobs he's criticizing.

We don't seem to mind (after reading the quotes from people who work there) that our bosses take occasional vacations (especially those planned months before they're asked to take jobs in other departments), why should you honestly care? Doesn't this kind of thing happen everywhere?

Given that there can be up to six elections a year, when do you -- in your apparently infinite wisdom -- believe one of our bosses (or anyone else here) can take a vacation?

Save the obvious political commentary for the TV ads.

Show the Puget Sound area you can do better than this.

Same goes for the people above and around you.

Michael Busick
Voter Services
206 296 1608