

FORUM

Don't make strong women targets



Ernie Pitt
This & That

I'm not sure if I spot a trend beginning here regarding female leadership, but it certainly smells like it. Most recently, the president of the Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce (Gayle Anderson) has been unfairly criticized for if not causing all or most of the city's economic woes, being at least partially responsible for most. Of course that's baloney, but when someone of influence wants you out, most of the time it is out you'll be.

That situation reminds me somewhat of the situation a short time ago regarding the female head of the Experiment in Self-Reliance, Twana Wellman. She was blamed for every mistake made even before she got there. In fact, many of the minor discretions were known about prior to her being hired. But she's a classy and strong lady just like Anderson, and Wellman has prevailed. I'm hoping that we've seen the last



Wellman

of the bogus attacks on Wellman.

Which brings me to the next female who may be in distress or on the way. I'm speaking about Leadership Winston-Salem's female director, Annette Scipio. Man! What a great job she has done and is doing to keep that program going.

I was a member of the first class of Leadership Winston-Salem, in 1985. A lot of my classmates have been supporters of Leadership Winston-Salem and continue to do so. Scipio has been at the helm for some 11 years now and, from what I'm told, has done a tremendous job. I certainly hope that she continues to get the support needed to carry the program forward.



Anderson

I know money is scarce as hen's teeth, but that program needs to continue. It is the most economical and most expedient way to accommodate 30 to 40 leaders in several different categories at the same time. It has proven to be the best way to make those persons aware of the issues facing the city as a whole as well as the many different segments.

Winston-Salem has become a truly diverse community in many ways. We have African-Americans, Hispanics and females in many important positions here. That is something for us to build on, not destroy. Our police chief is female, our assistant county manager is African-American, our city secretary is



Scipio

an African-American female, etc. That is truly remarkable. We should continue to build on that.

The next big hurdle is a more equitable business relationship between these diverse groups. I believe it will happen. In fact, I believe it is happening as we speak. I am encouraged, especially since The Chronicle is coming up on its 30th anniversary next year. That, my brothers and sisters, is a long time. Isn't God good to us? Amen!

Ernie Pitt is the publisher of The Chronicle and the chairman of the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem Board of Commissioners. E-mail him at erpitt@wschronicle.com.

Nigel Alston is on vacation. His Motivational Moments column will return next month.



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Will the genie grant a cigarette-ban wish?



Tommy J. Payne
Guest Columnist

Surgeon General Richard Carmona uncorked a genie's bottle of political hypocrisy with his comment before Congress that he would support banning the sale of tobacco products.

Why didn't such a bold, sincerely delivered statement, coming from the nation's top physician, win him praise from the anti-smoking lobby and politicians who have long decried smoking?

Leaving issues of individual freedom, adult responsibility, social engineering and political correctness aside, the answer may lie in that famous piece of advice, "Follow the money."

Carmona, perhaps unintentionally, revealed the ultimate game of wanting to have it both ways. The government is "addicted" to tobacco revenue.

Between 1998 and 2002, the government collected nearly \$135 billion from U.S. smokers, who have a median annual household income of about \$35,000. Government pockets more tobacco revenue per minute than the average working family brings home in a year. About 47 percent of the cost of an average pack of cigarettes goes to the government. (R.J. Reynolds Tobacco's profit per pack, in contrast, is about 3 percent.)

State governments are particularly dependent upon cigarette funding. If the surgeon general were to get his wish, for example, California would stand to lose \$2.3 billion annually. New York would be out \$2.1 billion. Texas would fall short by \$1.7 billion, and Michigan, more than \$1 billion.



Surgeon General Richard Carmona

In 2002, 44 states faced budget deficits. Twenty of them increased cigarette taxes to help make up the difference. To date this year, nine states have increased cigarette taxes. It's a good thing that the suggestion to ban this enormous revenue stream to the states came from a physician: A number of state governors might need CPR if they were told they'd lost their state tobacco revenues.

Ironically, even the anti-smoking lobby couldn't warm up to the concept of banning cigarettes. Given that revenues from taxes and the Master Settlement Agreement between the states and major

cigarette manufacturers have provided more than \$2 billion in funding for youth non-smoking programs and other tobacco-control activities, perhaps that's not as surprising as it might seem on its face.

Entirely apart from the government's financial dependence upon tobacco, banning a product used by nearly one-quarter of the adult U.S. population is a dicey proposal at best. Is it realistic to believe more than 40 million Americans would just quit smoking? The black market created by such a move would make the Sopranos look like a bunch of choir

boys.

So in supporting the abolition of the government's golden - if not platinum - goose, did Surgeon General Carmona lay an egg? Perhaps not. He deserves credit for raising an intellectually honest question of whether cigarettes should remain legal for adults in this country. If so, should they be operated by a government monopoly, as some nations do, or by private enterprise? And if they are to be operated by private enterprise, how should the manufacture and sale of a product with universally known health risks be regulated?

Current proposals to give the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authority to regulate cigarettes would be tantamount to granting Carmona his wish. The U.S. Supreme Court has already ruled that as currently chartered, the FDA would be obligated to ban cigarettes.

There are additional reasonable regulations that could be placed on U.S. cigarette manufacturers that could serve the public interest - for example, uniform good manufacturing practices, consistent standards for ingredients and their disclosure, and rules for communicating "tar" and nicotine yields. But reasonable federal regulation should not include restrictions that restrain legitimate competition between manufacturers for adult smokers' business, nor should it lead to de facto prohibition by making cigarettes unacceptable to the adults who choose to smoke them.

Perhaps the best characterization of the reaction to Carmona's position is this: Be careful what you ask for. You just might get it.

Tommy J. Payne is the executive vice president - external relations for R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Holdings Inc.

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