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IT'S A NICE PLACE TO VISIT, BUT... (Published Sept. 13, 2004, in the Columbia Business Times) - 9/13/2004

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IT'S A NICE PLACE TO VISIT, BUT... PRESIDENT'S SPEECH HURT LOCAL RETAIL SALES

COLUMBIA, Mo. – With both campaigns looking for ways to boost the economy, retailers on the east side of Columbia have a suggestion: “Don’t Campaign.”

The President spoke at the fairgrounds Tuesday, Sept. 7, and some local retailers say business was dead that afternoon.

“The Presidential motorcade killed our sales; for about six hours, we were dead in here,” said James Jameson, building materials and lumber associate at Home Depot. “I could have rolled a quarter down the entire length of the store, and nobody would have noticed.”

Aside from would-be shoppers who attended the festivities, the main reason for the slowdown in sales appears to be roadblocks set up by the Secret Service near the intersection of U.S. Highway 63 and Interstate 70 as the President rolled in from the West after speaking engagements in Lee’s Summit and Sedalia. Secret Service Agent Chuck Green said there were periodic stoppages on I-70, especially the eastbound side, starting from U.S. Highway 65 and heading eastward. Traffic was also stopped in nearby towns such as Boonville, through which the President’s motorcade paraded.

“We did see a decrease in business when he was here, from actually right before he spoke, and then it tapered off for the evening” said Scott Geitz, assistant manager at Sam’s Club. “We were up at noon, and we went downhill after that.”

The impact on local restaurants appears mixed. At the Burger King on Clark Lane, a manager who would not provide her name said there was a definite drop off in business between 3 and 4 p.m. when the nearby roads were closed. The Clark Lane Taco Bell refused to speak

about the issue, deferring to its Columbia central office, which reported noticing no difference in sales numbers.

As one of the major cities in a state that has chosen the winner in every election since 1900 except one, Columbia may see more of the candidates this fall. Businesses in the vicinity of Highway 63 and I-70 may jokingly ask that the President consider choosing the West side of town next time around.

"Maybe the way to boost the economy is not to campaign," Jameson said in jest.

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