

# VIEWPOINTS

FTZ SUMMER 2011 APRIL 22ND 2011

## South Dakota youth: A vital investment

A couple weeks ago, I commented on this page, in a column with the headline "Why would anyone want to live here?" that South Dakota, because of its standing as having the lowest tax collections in the nation last year, has become a haven for people of retirement age.

It was, admittedly, a satirical jab at trends that are occurring in our state right now. The Legislature and our governor have announced, "mission accomplished," trumpeting the 10 percent across the board cut to the budgets of a majority of state programs. In other words, they made ends meet this year not by implementing progressive reform in South Dakota's highly regressive tax system, combined with wise spending of our tax dollars.

They merely shifted the financial burden to our youth.

I don't think it can be argued that our local bodies of government, especially our school board and county commission, have never been in a mode when they have not conducted "wise spending." They've been forced to make ends meet year after year, somehow meeting a growing list of demands with a limited, and, especially in the terms of our school district, shrinking amount of financial resources.

I find it distressing that the cuts are affecting programs that serve to try to brighten the future for our state's young people. Education, for example - both K-12 and our regental system of state universities, including USD. And the state's Extension program, which makes it possible for counties across South Dakota, including Clay County, to hold their own Achievement Days as part of the county fair experience leading up to the State Fair.

I must admit I was a in a bit of funk when I pondered in my column of two weeks back the reasons for living here, so the sarcasm was flowing at a heavy rate. My wife and I find ourselves missing a great deal of entertainment offered to us free of charge, especially during the summer months.

For the past three years or so we have enjoyed the antics of the three young boys who lived in the big house directly across the street from ours.

They no longer scamper across the street onto our yard at times, ringing our doorbell. One time I answered the door to find one of the toe-headed three amigos on my front steps.

"Could you make us a pie?" he asked.

He was SO serious. But hey, this was during the summer, he and his brothers had been playing hard and no doubt were hungry, and I somehow kept a straight face while

### BETWEEN THE LINES



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telling my young neighbor that I'd never baked one and I'm sure if I did, he wouldn't want to eat it.

"Oh," he replied. And just like that, in

a blur of blonde hair, he zipped across the street to join his brothers in their latest adventure.

This young Vermillion family, who welcomed a fourth addition to their family late last year - yet another boy - has moved to North Dakota where opportunity beckons.

My wife and I are now forced to stare at the For Sale sign in the empty house's front lawn.

Hence, my somewhat surly mood a couple weeks ago.

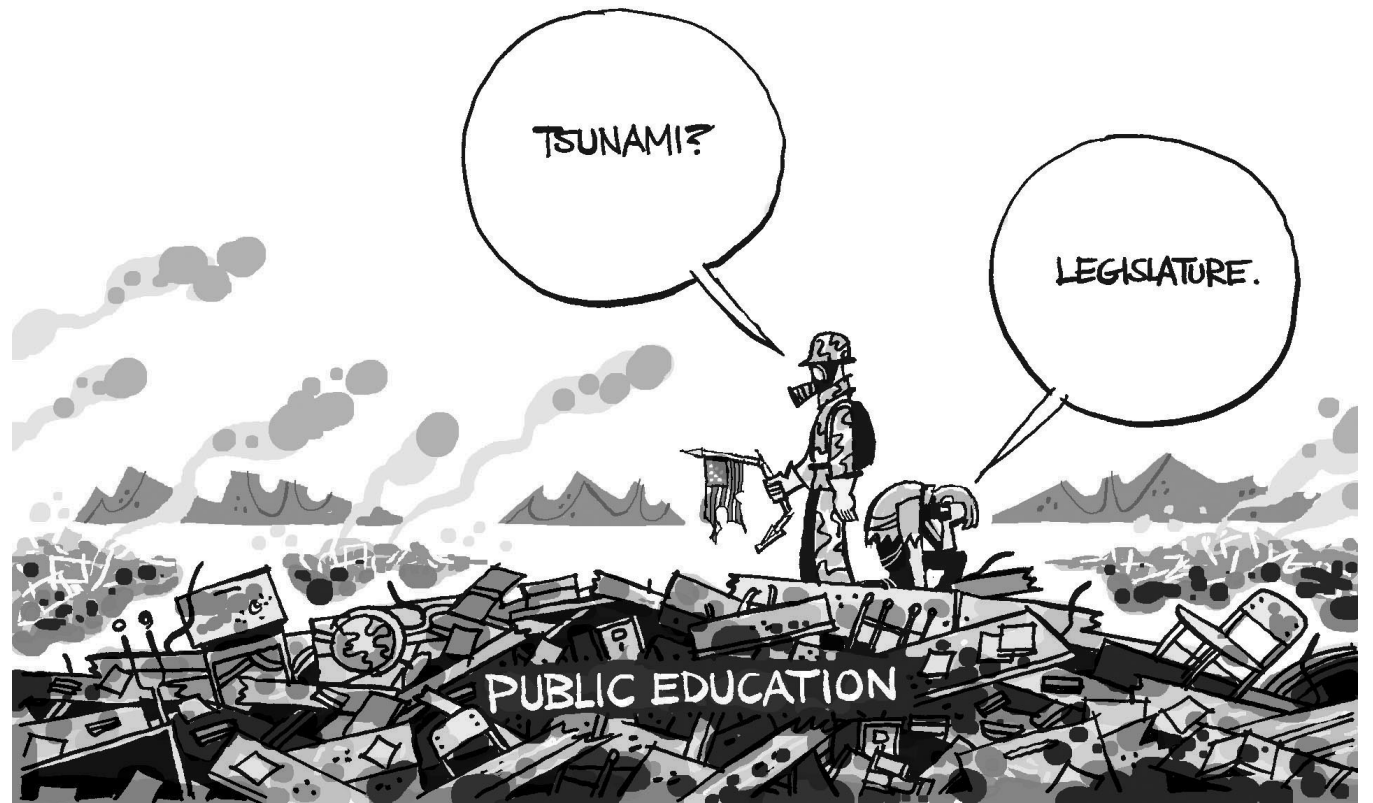
I'm not ready to give up on South Dakota, however, and neither is my wife. We were both born and raised in this state, growing up a mere 30 miles from each other. We feel well grounded here, despite the fact that, while the Sioux Falls area seems to be growing like crazy, nearly every other area of the state simply holds its own.

And there is a bit of good news. According to a recent Associated Press-Viacom poll of Americans ages 18 to 24, an overwhelming majority of this age group say they're happy with their lives. In fact, their level of happiness exceeds those of older folks who participate in similar surveys.

A majority expects to have a harder time buying a house and saving for retirement than their parents did. More than 4 in 10 predict it will be tougher to raise a family and afford the lifestyle they want. Only about a fourth expect things to be easier for them than the previous generation - a cherished goal of many hardworking parents.

Young people, it seems, provide the one thing that's never in too much supply, even in a homespun, folksy state like South Dakota.

They offer hope. It's why investing in our youth is so vital now.



## A Review: Came empty, left full to overflowing

SIOUX CITY, Iowa — Thousands descended upon the Tyson Event Center here on Saturday, March 19, 2011.

Our hearts and souls supple from lives of longing and lonesomeness. Our minds pliable, searching for sovereignty, seeking sureness, sojourning sorrows.

"All the lonely people cryin' It could change if we just get started"

While waiting for the opening act, the sold-out crowd bears down behind me, in front of me, surrounding me as a massive congregation.

Elated conversant screams sprinkle their chit-chat. A Christmas morning thrill intersperses a heightened murmur penetrating thick air.

"Light the darkness, light a fire For the silent and the brokenhearted"

This unholy assembly, I included, is banking on the arrival of greatness, soon, very soon. We count down the minutes, our eyes pace back and forth over the stage, trying to detect movement of any kind that would herald the arrival.

"When the walls fall all around you When your hope has turned to dust"

We are a communion of saints and sinners, desiring to be bathed in a river of hope, knowing we came in broken, anticipating we will leave whole.

### MY STORY YOUR STORY



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of music and elated cheers, Sugarland's Jennifer Owens and Kristian Nettles appear on stage, front and center.

"High above the pain and sorrow Won't you stand up"

Jennifer's satiny, bounding vocal performance, as a blessing, impeccably and lovingly preaches reconciliation and salvation.

Any tiredness we hulled into the arena flew away on her very first note. Kristian's rough, ready chorus solidly backs up her anthems.

With so many exuberance, we can't sit still and will gladly stand for the next hour

The show eventually began at 7:30, but it's going on 9 and the main act is nowhere to be seen.

"There's a comfort There's healing"

Although that doesn't seem to matter much. A sacred anticipation carries us from opening acts Casey James to Little Big Town.

And then it is done. With a bounding force

of music and elated cheers, Sugarland's Jennifer Owens and Kristian Nettles appear on stage, front and center.

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Any tiredness we hulled into the arena flew away on her very first note. Kristian's rough, ready chorus solidly backs up her anthems.

With so many exuberance, we can't sit still and will gladly stand for the next hour

and a half of the show.

"Stand up, stand up? Won't you stand up you girls and boys?"

I will remember this night forever for ...

- the penetrating perfume of the young woman sitting next to me.
- the praise music of this country band.
- the worship tones, raised hands and swaying bodies of this crowd.

I will remember this night forever because I never expected a concert venue to feel so much like a worship hall, because I went to the well empty and left full to overflowing.

(Lyrics: "Tonight" and "Stand Up" by Sugarland)

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 and 2010 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contest, her columns took five first-place awards. To contact Paula, email boscodamon-paula@gmail, follow her blog at my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on FaceBook.

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## S.D. EDITORIAL ROUNDUP

The Associated Press

Argus Leader: April 12

### Use judicial opening to examine diversity

The retirement of Justice Judith Meierhenry from the state Supreme Court raises the question of her successor and the importance of female representation on the high court.

It's always sound public policy to try to ensure that public bodies and courtrooms reflect the makeup of society.

But that's true for the state's entire court system, not just the Supreme Court. So the opening gives us the opportunity to take a broad look at representation throughout the court system.

Are we encouraging a diverse judicial system? Are there programs to identify and encourage young lawyers of color, for instance? Is there a conscious attempt to build a diverse judicial branch similar to the efforts that can be found in the private sector?

Clearly, there aren't - nor should there be - any reserved spots for people of any particular background. But it's still important to consider the court system's overall makeup and seize opportunities that help make the system as reflective of the community as possible.

In many ways, the selection process for judges and justices helps negate some people's perception that being conscious of diversity leads to lower standards.

The governor chooses judges and justices from a list of candidates vetted by the Judicial Qualifications Commission. The governor can reject everyone on the list but cannot choose someone who has not been cleared by the commission.

Indeed, if the commission puts forth the name of a qualified woman for the vacant seat, Gov. Dennis Daugaard should seriously consider her for the appointment.

But he and the state's legal community also should work on many levels to ensure equality and diversity throughout the state's courtrooms.

Aberdeen American News: April 10

### Daugaard lives up to expectations in first 3 mos.

Since taking office three months ago, Gov. Dennis Daugaard has done much of what he said he was going to do.

From getting aggressive on state budget cuts or opening Valhalla at Custer State Park, Daugaard is on his way to doing many of the things he promised he'd do when he was a candidate.

Whether we agree with all of his decisions or not, we have to applaud him for living up to a wide swath of promises. And for that, we give Daugaard a solid B for his first three months in office.

When we endorsed him for governor in this space back in October, we clearly expressed our reservations, questioning Daugaard's ability to motivate and innovate. We were concerned that it not be more of the same of the Gov. Mike Rounds years: Secretive and status quo, without a strong team for support.

During his endorsement interview with our editorial board, Daugaard presented himself as laid-back, which was a concern for us considering the background role he played as lieutenant governor in the Rounds administration. We wanted to know that he could step up and lead.

However, we also wrote, "He is a sincere person who carefully studies issues when they are brought before him. He gets along well with people and seems to have a natural respect for others. And his decades of professional work show he understands financial management, a very important trait at any time for a governor but especially under the current strain of revenue falling behind spending."

And that is what has counted these first three months.

At the time of our endorsement, we were critical of Daugaard and Democratic opponent Scott Heidepriem for a lack of specifics on dealing with the state's budget deficit. Once elected, however, Daugaard quickly spelled out a difficult plan that was in keeping with his campaign promises.

Daugaard has stayed on message his first three months, something many

politicians find isn't all that easy, especially when the message has been as unpopular as Daugaard's recommended 10 percent cuts to state agencies, departments and services. What we all found, however, is that those cuts weren't as hard to find as believed, and they weren't as deep as first proposed.

In addition, we do believe that Daugaard did right by the state in doing the research and then hitting the road to explain his plan. For instance, just after his announcement of the cuts, he met with the American News editorial board, and then went on to chat live with our readers on <http://www.aberdeennews.com>.

There have been a couple of speed bumps, not always of Daugaard's making. He was tossed a hot potato by the Republican-controlled Legislature - the mandatory abortion waiting period bill. That put South Dakota into the national spotlight, which, in a way was unfair to the governor, who was backed into a corner to sign the bill.

Daugaard also used common sense, even when it meant twice vetoing one of his own proposals on technicalities.

The true test for Daugaard will be in 2012, when many of the cuts he has endorsed and bills he has signed will come into play. He has vowed that South Dakota cannot "kick the can down the road," meaning we must all deal with the budget deficit now.

Let's see if he can stay on point through what are sure to be difficult battles and discussions through the coming months and years.

Watertown Public Opinion: April 11

### State pension system must be righted

We hope South Dakota Retirement System Board members and, if not them, the Legislature and governor look at what's going on around the country with public pension systems and the nation's Social Security system.

To say it's a mess is a gross understatement. Many states and cities are on the brink of defaulting on their pension obligations to millions of retired government employees. That's a scenario our state must avoid at all costs.

And to think that can't happen here is hogwash - it can.

Go back in history to these facts discussed in a recent story by Bob Mercer, P/O Capitol Correspondent:

- 2007: SDRS system reaches its zenith with a peak value at \$8.2 billion (+21.7 percent) - all is good;

- 2008: The start of the national recession, a big market dip begins, and SDRS declines in value by 8.7 percent;

- 2009: We are into a full blown recession, the stock market stinks and SDRS declines in value by another 20.4 percent;

- 2010: The recession continues but recovery starts, and the stock market improves - SDRS increases by 18.7 percent.

And it looks like the SDRS fund this year could make up for all those losses from the past few years and finally get back to a balance that is in the black again.

However, there is a red flag as was discussed at the SDRS board meeting: there is a "50-50" chance the fund may not be able to keep up with the assumed 7.75 percent rate needed to keep fund balances where they are today and that, in turn, means future problems for the system.

So, what's the solution? Now the fund is back in the black, we would recommend the board alter the payout and investment percentages such that they can almost guarantee - with 90 percent accuracy - a solvent system for current and future payouts.

That is, of course, not good news for current retirees depending on pension payouts from SDRS. But, if we have learned anything from what's going on across our nation, especially at the state and local level, paying too rich of a payout today could mean drastic measures up to and including insolvency sometime down the road. It is far better today to take our medicine and get the ship righted permanently than risk a bit more payout today on a too-rosy investment return scenario for tomorrow.

The time for SDRS to do this hard work is now - not tomorrow, but now.

## ONLINE POLL RESULTS

Do you believe you'll notice the shutdown of the federal government?

Yes	15
No	14
Don't know	1
Total Votes	20

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