

## VIEWPOINTS

Capitol Notebook:

# Lawmakers, governor already working on 2015 legislation

By Bob Mercer  
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE – The 2014 legislative session ended March 31 in a matter of 10 minutes without any vetoes to consider on veto day. But discussions already were brewing on significant issues that will get attention in the 2015 session that opens Jan. 13.

Coming are recommendations from the task force on pheasant population that the governor appointed after the Huron summit in December.

And the workforce development study and the railroad service study that Gov. Dennis Daugaard commissioned last year as well.

We also look forward to consideration of the rural-roads

situation, where counties and townships want more freedom to spend or more help from state government – or both.

If you watch the price spread between E-10 and straight unleaded gasoline, you'll notice it's now in the 20-cent range after the rules changes made two summers ago.

That raises the question of whether the 2-cent tax break is still needed for ethanol blends after 30 years – and whether that uncollected revenue might be helpful for South Dakota's road system.

The Lottery Commission, rebuffed by legislators on raising the \$2 bet limit for video lottery and allowing establishments to have more than 10 video lottery machines, will look again at how

to generate more revenue for state government.

The Legislature's permanent task force on agricultural land assessments will consider changes in the definition of agricultural property for tax purposes.

Legislation that came out of Pennington County to redefine agricultural land gathered a lot of traction in the 2014 session, but didn't have the blessing of the task force or county officials statewide.

Likely to be part of that issue is the freeze on agriculture's portion of K-12 general-education funding.

The freeze was meant to ensure agriculture kept paying its share, but it also meant agriculture didn't pay more during the recent years of rising land values.

Land values will underlie talks among legislators on teacher salaries.

Look for proposals on increasing state general funding for the state universities and the four public technical institutes.

The tuition and mandatory fees freeze for residents at the universities approved by the Board of Regents, and the tuition freeze (but increased fees) at the tech schools approved by the Board of Education, are part of workforce development.

There might be another attempt at solving the dilemma of public access to floodwaters over private land. One proposal could be a county option added to the plan that ran into opposition from Day County-area landowners this year.

The Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee will look at the Future Fund, which has no public oversight. The governor has exclusive control over its \$10 million-plus annual revenue.

GOAC also has the law enforcement officer training fund as a priority. The programs rely on penalties paid for breaking laws. Revenue is falling and no longer keeps up with costs.

Supreme Court Chief Justice David Gilbertson and state Attorney General Marty Jackley spoke to GOAC in early January.

There's also a juvenile sexual abuse task force and an autism workgroup for legislators.

The coming months will not be quiet or dull, especially not in an election year.

Guest commentary:

## Johnson introduces legislation to end dropped calls

By Sen. Tim Johnson (D-SD)

Rural communities in South Dakota continue to experience problems with long-distance or wireless telephone calls not being properly connected. The call completion problems extend beyond South Dakota and have affected rural telephone customers in dozens of states. These call failures create frustration and concern for family members trying to connect with friends and family, as well as small businesses losing business because they miss calls from customers.

The problems also pose a serious public safety threat, such as when a police dispatcher cannot reach law enforcement or when a doctor cannot call a patient regarding follow-up care. Rural telephone customers affected by this problem are rightfully frustrated and demand a solution.

To be honest, I could barely believe it when I first learned about this issue. Today, we should be worried about narrowing the digital divide – not worrying whether rural communities have access to basic telephone service. While many factors could be at play, the Federal Communications

Commission believes the use of third-party "least cost routers" to connect calls is a leading cause of the problem.

It appears that some of these intermediate providers are failing to properly complete calls to avoid the higher access charges associated with rural telephone networks. It is particularly challenging to resolve the problem because calls are often dropped before they reach the rural telephone network, making it difficult for rural providers to pinpoint when and where problems occur.

Recently, I introduced in the Senate the Public Safety and Economic Security Communications Act. This legislation takes immediate action to stop the bad actors that are failing to complete calls to rural areas. The bill includes common sense reforms that will help end the discriminatory delivery of calls by requiring voice providers to register with the FCC and comply with basic service quality standards. The legislation will help ensure that small businesses, families, and emergency responders in every corner of South Dakota and across our country can once again rely upon the connection of their incoming telephone calls.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### 4-H teaches valuable lessons To the editor:

4-H is often thought of a being a program strictly for "farm kids." My aim is to educate you on why 4-H can benefit kids from any background with any interest. As an active 4-H member for 10 years I learned 4-H is a personalized organization enabling members to grow through constructive criticism and hard work.

I grew up on a farm, but my involvement in 4-H was not limited to farm projects. I showed cattle, sheep, horses, and even pigs; however, I additionally challenged myself to expand my interests and activities to other areas 4-H offered. I quickly realized if I could think it, 4-H had it. The opportunities are endless and each member will learn to challenge themselves by receiving criticism through judging and continuing to work hard to make his or her best even better.

4-H is about much more than getting involved in an organization. Every project one completes inadvertently

teaches life lessons. For example, after caring for my animals I gained a sense of responsibility to take care of feeding, watering, exercising and training my animal for competition and for its best health. I learned how to manage and save my money when I received monetary awards for projects. I overcame my nerves and shyness and stood in front of judges and crowds to give a demonstration. I realized how fulfilling it is to set goals and work tirelessly to achieve them. Sharing my success and failure I experienced in 4-H with my friends and family made every step unforgettable.

The effect 4-H had on me throughout the course of 10 years will last my entire life. Take this opportunity to join an organization that equips you with the tools necessary to see continual growth throughout your childhood and into your adult life. My involvement in 4-H taught me valuable life lessons that I can apply to every challenge and goal I face.

Carrie Whittle  
Vermillion



Chief Justice Magoo.

## It all begins right here

I live in what was once called a bedroom community. We don't use that term anymore. A bedroom community got its name back in the mid-20th century, when urban sprawl became the norm. That was when people moved to smaller unincorporated communities on the outskirts of the towns from where they commuted to work.

Even though this area is now incorporated, in many ways it remains a bedroom community with a majority of residents working elsewhere.

While our crime rate is low and we don't have an officially sanctioned neighborhood watch program, there are some of us who are on the lookout, noticing menacing intruders, spotting anything out of place and watching out for one another.

Take for example the Davis Park area. Now there's a group of neighborhood watch warriors who are intent on keeping their neck of the woods from harm.

And these are not only parents of young children who holler when they notice any aggression or injustice toward their youngsters. The grandparents in that neighborhood have migrated to an even fiercer place of protective hovering.

A hue of safety surrounds Davis Park. Through slightly opened blinds, partially drawn drapes and parted café curtains, watchful eyes of moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas – and even the long stares of those who never bore children, peer out to the park, making sure "their kids" are protected.

### MY STORY YOUR STORY



PAULA DAMON  
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In the Davis Park area, looking out for the kiddies is a daily charge residents don't take lightly. The majority are normal everyday folks, who rarely venture very far from their recliners and TV remotes.

Angling with long views first

to the right and then to the left, they crane their necks, ever watchful, searching hard beyond the park's benignly mundane normalcy.

They wouldn't think twice about bolting through their front doors and vaulting thoroughfares to defend their youngsters against prowling teens, whose foul language is so charring it could melt the tar off any roof for miles.

In many other places, such an enlarged sense of responsibility is considered a lost cultural practice – one that we more or less treasure here and proudly wear as a badge of honor.

In my opinion, neighborhood watches are the beginning of the world. This is where we learn to take care of one another with a watchful providence hard to find elsewhere.

I, too, have my own brand of neighborhood watch, noticing what's changed or not on my walks and rides around town.

Take for example Marvel's little bungalow. Still for sale, it went on the market last October after she

passed. One day, her kids and their kids came and cleaned out the place, packing up all of her stuff in cardboard boxes, save the Cape Cod curtains in the kitchen window and that sea shell sun-catcher still glistening with her bright spirit.

I miss Marvel and her cheery hellos with one arm waving briskly like a flag high above her silver perm. And her little Scott Terrier – what a trooper he was and noisy as could be. I sort of miss him and his sharp annoying yelp that never quit until I was long past her gate. Wonder what happened to him?

And there's Veryl's place. There are no tire tracks leading to or from his recently snow-filled driveway, and that dried-out evergreen Christmas wreath he put out in December now droops over his garage door.

Is he OK? The last time I saw him was at the doctor's office in January. He was still lugging that darn oxygen tank around and forever adjusting those tubes up his nose. Said he was battling pneumonia. They were going to take some X-rays. Hope he's just spending winter in Texas with his daughter and grandchildren and has not been sent away to the old folk's home.

You see, this is one of the problems with bedroom communities. A majority of residents are away all day with hardly a soul to notice who's doing what, when, how and why – save a scattering of hardy retired folks keeping watch and all of those chatty squirrels.

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