

VIEWPOINTS

NOTE TO OUR READERS

There is no local editorial column this week. Please make sure to see our next issue for local content from a new columnist. - Plain Talk Staff

Students Carry Load At State Colleges Without State's Help

By Bob Mercer
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — South Dakota students pay some of the highest tuition and fees for public campuses in the region. Yet the financial aid available to assist students lags far behind neighboring states.

Earlier this year, the Legislature and Gov. Dennis Daugaard took a rare step. The universities received additional funding to avoid raising tuition and fees for South Dakota residents.

The Board of Regents, whose members govern the system, meet Wednesday and Thursday in Pierre to set the system's next round of budget requests.

The dilemma the regents face in the next few days is whether to ask again.

The student leadership had accepted higher tuition and fees in the past two decades because the Legislature didn't provide enough funding to keep pace.

Students paid extra, for example, so the universities could offer higher salaries that drew faculty closer to levels of pay at public universities in neighboring states.

And students paid higher fees, campus by campus, so they could have better facilities where they eat meals and work out and study.

The tuition and fees freeze for the fall 2014 and spring 2015 semesters marked a turning point.

If the regents don't ask, the governor and the Legislature likely won't consider continuing the freeze for a second year.

Funding previously was so tight from the Legislature that the universities have immense backlogs of building maintenance and repairs and other infrastructure needs. They will take several decades and more than \$300 million to recover.

Addressing the tuition problem and restoring more of the brick, mortar, heating, cooling and electricity systems leaves little or no money for establishing a better financial aid program to help students.

There's also little or no money left for expansions or new programs in our changing economy and changing state.

A second year of tuition and fees buy-down would cost an estimated \$6.8 million. Another \$1.7 million is needed to offset what students would otherwise pay in additional costs for support of existing buildings.

The regents will look at seeking \$1.7 million to restore some of the buying power of the Opportunity scholarship.

Measured against the cost of two semesters of courses, the \$5,000 scholarship's value was 26 percent when it began in 2004 and now is 16 percent.

The proposal presented to the regents calls for setting the scholarship's total value at 20 percent of tuition and fees for 30 credit hours annually over four academic years.

The scholarship is distributed on a four-year basis: \$1,000 each of the first three years, followed by \$2,000 the fourth year.

The regents again are asked to create a permanent position called director of student preparation to recruit and retain more American Indians to attend the state universities.

Another proposal calls for \$2 million of ongoing general funds to pay staff at universities to work on student success, better assist veterans and broaden students' training experiences.

The regents also will consider proposals for \$21.8 million in one-time general funding.

The regents' decisions are step one. Next is winning the governor's recommendations. The test comes in January through March when legislators put together the new budget.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Expanded Plain Talk is 'unbelievable'

As long-time subscriber to The Plain Talk (over 20 years), I just have to say that this last issue was just "unbelievable". Your new coverage of sports, local stories, news and events is fantastic!! For the small price of the subscription and all the expanded features - I say kudos to Vermillion's local newspaper. I can't wait until the next issue.

Lindy Wipf, Vermillion

LETTER TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Plain Talk encourages its readers to write letters to the editor, and it asks that a few simple guidelines be followed.

Please limit letters to 300 words or less.

Only signed letters with

writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail or drop off at 201 W. Cherry St., Vermillion, SD 57069, fax to 624-4696 or e-mail to alan.dale@plaintalk.net.



'To Thee I Wed...'

Marriage advice after 42 years

"To keep your marriage brimming with love, whenever you're wrong, admit it; whenever you're right, shut up." - Ogden Nash, poet

Here I sit several days past the 42 year-mark, when my husband and I stood at the altar, young and unaware, and said those faithful words, "I do."

Even though I had intended on drafting this little prose on our anniversary, I got carried away trying to be a good wife all day long. I really wanted to be on my best behavior, since I slipped up on Father's Day by giving him one of those looks, causing him to say, "You should see the look on your face - and on Father's Day?"

A lasting marriage is a bit like that: two steps forward, one step back, and I have logged my share of what not to do.

I think too many couples get caught up in unrealistic expectations of what their spousal unions should be. But truthfully, it's the less than romantic details that have shaped our relationship into what it is today.

Funny thing, with this many years beyond the altar at a stage now that some may call "sainthood" (which it is not), rarely, if ever, does anyone ask, "What's your secret?"

No secret, really. You could say what has sustained us thus far has been good old-fashioned stick-to-itiveness. In other words: we didn't give up.

Oh, we had our share of wanting to throw in the towel. But at the end of the day, we hung in there, even though our

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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opposite natures seemed to be on a constant collision course.

When we thought we'd had enough of all those little irritations that had gotten the best of us and in spite of our many disagreements, disappointments and disapprovals, we simply carried

on.

It's not that we arrived 42 winters, springs, summers and autumns beyond our early love at some mythical, magical place, where we were enlightened and everything was hunky dory.

We are still learning and growing.

I suppose if anyone really wanted to know how we made it, I'd say half-jokingly and half-seriously that we had nothing to do with it - but rather it was an act of God all along.

No, it hasn't always been pretty or pleasant. We've had unutterable moments when we thought it was the end. And, surprisingly we learned, it was not the end unless we decided it was. Funny how that works?

I suppose that's why the list-maker in me needs to assemble what has acted as a healing balm in our relationship of 42 years and some odd days. Not to give advice, but to act as a narrative for

myself - a "to-do" list, reminding me of what has worked. It would sort of goes like this...

1. Don't just be sensitive and responsive to your spouse's needs - be overly so.
2. Spend all of your waking hours trying to out-serve each other. Breakfast in bed would be a good start.
3. Play his favorite album and dance like no one's looking, because no one really is looking or cares for that matter.
4. Put your love into action - make it visible.
5. Remember: keeping score is for sports teams, not marriages.
6. Tell the truth, even if it hurts.
7. Date each other, like you used to before you got hitched.
8. Take turns getting your way.
9. Don't be sarcastic.
10. Don't be critical, either.
11. Slow down and make time to be responsive to each other.
12. Quit striving for perfection.

There's no place called perfect, unless, of course, you've died and gone to heaven.

You see, sustaining a lasting relationship with my husband has been a methodical march on my way to becoming more generous, more open, more available, more loving - on my way to realizing there's no such thing as too much of any of these.

If anyone really wanted to know how we made it this far, that's probably what I'd say.

S.D. EDITORIAL ROUNDUP

The Associated Press

American News, Aberdeen, Aug. 6, 2014

GOP fails on EB-5 scandal

Did you know that the EB-5 scandal in South Dakota is all done?

No one wants to ask more questions, so there must be no problems.

We know this because state Republican lawmakers on the Government Operations and Audit Committee said they aren't interested in learning anything more.

They refuse to issue a subpoena to Joop Bollen of the Aberdeen-based SDRC Inc. Bollen is the only person alive who, we assume, can shed light on South Dakota's use of the EB-5 program to generate funding for some businesses, including the failed Northern Beef Packers plant.

Rep. Susan Wismer, D-Britton and a candidate for South Dakota governor, was plowed over last week at a GOAC meeting. Despite her attempts to get the Legislative panel - dominated by Republicans - to call Bollen to testify, she was met with a resounding "no."

"I think this is outside the scope of what we're talking about at this time," Rep. Justin Cronin, R-Gettysburg, said by phone during the meeting, according to a story by American News reporter Bob Mercer.

Outside the scope, you say? In fact, the GOAC was tasked with learning about EB-5, the

controversial program that recruits foreign investors to put money into U.S. businesses in an effort to seek U.S. residency.

Clearly there were problems with the effective administration of EB-5 in South Dakota, culminating with the actions of Richard Benda, the state's former economic development director, who apparently double-billed the state \$5,559 for three flights and redirected \$550,000 in economic development money for his own use.

Attorney General Marty Jackley said last week that Benda would have been charged with felony theft had Benda not killed himself in 2013.

Benda was employed by SDRC.

So, wouldn't state Republicans, those eagle-eyed truth-seekers, want to interview the last man who might know what's going on?

While the GOP has been quite vocal about such "scandals" as "Benghazi," "Obamacare" and Common Core, state Republicans are turning down the chance to investigate a real, live scandal in their own backyard.

One they actually have a chance to do something about. But they don't want to know anything more.

The EB-5 controversy has been a black mark on South Dakota and state leadership. It is a complex issue and investigation, made more cumbersome by the tangled personal and/or political relationships of former Gov. and Senate candidate Mike Rounds,

Gov. Dennis Daugaard, Jackley and Benda.

We can't believe that state legislators know all there is to know about how the state used EB-5, and who could have stopped its misuse.

What's more galling is that those lawmakers don't think you need to know anything more.

For shame.

Rapid City Journal, Rapid City, Aug. 8, 2014

VA answer may be private care

When the scandal broke about how some U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs systems were falsifying records to hide inadequate treatment for veterans, we were initially relieved that the Black Hills VA Health Care System was not one of them.

We were disappointed to learn last week that an internal audit by the VA found that the Black Hills VA, in fact, was one of medical care systems that manipulated records. According to the audit, 14 percent of schedulers said they had been instructed to manipulate patients' requests for an appointment to make it appear that the Black Hills VA was responsive to veterans in its care.

VA policy is to enter the date a veteran requests for an appointment as the "desired date" even if that time is not available. Some VA staff members were told to change the requested date to one closer to the next available appointment. This was done to make it appear that the Black

Hills VA was following VA policy better than it was.

An audit of 900 VA facilities in the United States found 112 systems with questionable scheduling practices, including the Black Hills VA Health Care System.

"The scheduling issues raised by the VHA audit are very serious, and I am particularly concerned about the problems pointed out at the Black Hills VA," Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D., said last week.

President Obama signed a VA reform bill on Thursday that halts scheduled bonuses for VA employees, and appropriates \$17 billion to allow some veterans to seek private care if necessary. The bill also gives newly confirmed VA Secretary Robert McDonald the authority to fire senior officials for mismanagement.

Throwing money at a problem is Washington's way of claiming to have solved problems, but if the private care option improves medical care delivery to veterans, it should be expanded.

There's no excuse for neglecting veterans and manipulating data.

Our nation's veterans deserve prompt attention and quality medical care.

If the bureaucrats at the VA are more interested in falsifying records to make it appear that they are doing a good job than in actually delivering quality medical care to veterans, then privatizing medical treatment for veterans may be the best solution.

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