

Planned Parenthood Funding Fight Might Cut A Different Way

BY BOB MERCER
STATE CAPITOL BUREAU

PIERRE – The decision by Paula Hawks to be a Democratic candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives means U.S. Rep. Kristie Noem, a Republican, will have an opponent in the 2016 election for South Dakota's only seat in the chamber of 435.

Noem starts with big advantages.

She holds the office, has been through four statewide contests and won all four, and is very much a Republican in a very Republican state. This is Hawks' first statewide run.

On federal funding for

Planned Parenthood to provide services to women, Hawks takes the opposite side of Noem and South Dakota's two Republican U.S. senators, Mike Rounds and John Thune.

Noem, Rounds and Thune are part of a national Republican effort to strip Planned Parenthood of the money. Federal law prohibits using it for abortions.

The goal is to financially cripple Planned Parenthood, the only publicly acknowledged provider of abortions in South Dakota.

South Dakota went through two difficult fights over banning most abortions. Each time the question went to a statewide

vote, abortion remained legal.

The first came in 2006, after the Legislature approved a ban on most abortions and then Gov. Rounds signed it into law. Abortion-rights supporters referred it and voters blocked it.

The outcome was 146,648 yes for the law and 185,945 against it.

Abortion opponents came right back and put a similar ban on the 2008 ballot. Voters rejected it too. The tally was 167,560 yes and 206,535 no.

The attempted bans were direct challenges to the 1973 decision in the Roe v. Wade case where the U.S. Supreme Court legalized

abortions nationwide.

Going after Planned Parenthood funding now is a roundabout route toward the same goal.

It is a concerted effort. For example, Thune and Rounds issued identically worded news releases from their offices on the topic last month.

In the U.S. Senate they were part of a Republican effort Aug. 3 to proceed to consideration of legislation from Iowa Republican Joni Ernst to strip the funding.

The attempt needed 60 yes votes. The outcome was 53-46, with Thune and Rounds among the 53.

The Senate Republicans' leader, Mitch McConnell of

Kentucky, voted no. That maneuver enables McConnell to bring the matter up again.

Noem meanwhile declared she would again co-sponsor House legislation to cut off the funding. It has passed there before.

Hawks, a second-term member of the state House of Representatives from Hartford, immediately staked her spot on the Planned Parenthood side.

Abortions, as reported to the state Department of Health, have declined somewhat in South Dakota but remain prevalent since the attempts at the bans.

There were 707 in 2007; 848 in 2008; 769 in 2009; 737

in 2010; 597 in 2011; 634 in 2012; and 601 in 2013. Those numbers include South Dakota residents and others. The 2014 data aren't completely available yet.

Elections are decided on many issues. Eventually the Planned Parenthood fight will come down to voters understanding how body parts of unborn children are disposed after abortions.

This is gruesome. Oddly, if public sentiment from the 2006 and 2008 ballot measures still holds, Hawks might have helped herself.

Employing People With Disabilities

A COLUMN BY
GOV. DENNIS DAUGAARD:

My mom and dad took pride in self-reliance and taught me the value of hard work. They both worked hard on our family farm, and when the farm went upside-down financially, they both took jobs as janitors at Augustana College to make ends meet.

Mom and Dad were also both deaf, but their inability to hear did not prevent them from working to support my sisters and me. They taught us that all work has dignity and that idleness is not an option. Their disability led them to develop higher levels of determination and persistence.

In 2013, about 65 percent of

Americans with disabilities were not working or looking for work. In South Dakota, that number is about 51 percent.

Even though our unemployment rate for those with disabilities is much lower than other states', it's still too high. There are too many South Dakotans with disabilities who want a job but can't find one.

My goal is to make South Dakota an "employment first state." This means making employment the first priority and the preferred outcome for our citizens with disabilities.

As a result of the Employment Works Task Force I established in 2013, the Department of Human Services is now providing technical assistance to employers and

connecting them with qualified individuals. I am also challenging the state of South Dakota to become a model employer of people with disabilities.

As a part of this employment first effort, we're striving to show employers what Walmart, Camille's Sidewalk Café in Sioux Falls, Larson Manufacturing and SDSU in Brookings, Black Hills Corporation and many other businesses already know. We are a state that faces considerable workforce needs and there is an untapped labor pool comprised of people with disabilities who are ready, willing and completely ABLE to work.

On Tuesday, Aug. 11, the South Dakota Retailers Association is partnering with the Department of

Human Services to host a webinar to guide employers through the process of finding and hiring people with disabilities. That same day, the Department of Human Services is launching an awareness campaign called "Ability for Hire." This campaign aims to educate employers about the benefits of hiring those with disabilities, and to change misperceptions about them.

South Dakota is making definite progress in this arena, but there is always more to be done. I urge all South Dakotans to pitch in on this issue – to hire more qualified workers with disabilities; to support businesses in their efforts to employ people with disabilities; and to prepare youth for an expect-

tation of a lifetime of work rather than public support. You can also help spread the word about AbilityForHire.com when it launches Aug. 11.

The experiences of businesses like Camille's and Black Hills Corporation demonstrate that change is possible. These businesses are proving that employing people with disabilities is not an act of charity or sympathy; it's enlightened self-interest at its very best. It enriches and diversifies our workforce. It's good for business and good for taxpayers. Best of all, it provides a willing worker an opportunity for the self-respect earned through personal achievement.

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