

# VIEWPOINTS

## A question: What will it hurt?

Have you been keeping track (perhaps attempting to keep track is a better way to phrase this question) of the of the Governor's Office of Economic Development and South Dakota's EB-5 visa investment program?

Alleged wrongdoings of the implementation of this program, particularly in regards to the failed Northern Beef Packers plant in Aberdeen, have warranted both state and federal investigations.

The state has more or less closed the books on its investigation, noting that \$550,000 of state incentives to the Northern Beef plant were wrongfully redirected to EB-5 loan monitoring fees, and that then-economic development secretary Richard Benda double-billed for more than \$5,000 in expenses related to EB-5 promotion.

Benda died of a shotgun blast to the abdomen on Oct. 20 while hunting alone near Lake Andes. Investigators recently ruled his death a suicide.

State Rep. Kathy Tyler, D-Big Stone City, believes the Legislature should meet before the end of the month to authorize and pay for its own, independent audit into the EB-5 visa program, which funded the bankrupt Northern Beef Packers plant and more than a dozen other South Dakota projects.

### BETWEEN THE LINES



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Tyler argued the massive failure of Northern Beef, which received several million dollars in state grants and loans, demands a vigorous accounting that tracks

every expense.

We're going to assume that Tyler likely will receive massive resistance from the Republican majority that exists in both houses of our state Legislature. She'll likely be branded as a Democrat trying only to score political points in the highly conservative atmosphere in our state Capitol building.

Our response to Tyler's naysayers is a simple question: What will it hurt?

What will it hurt to, as Tyler suggests, call a special session of the Legislature to perform the full "forensic" audit that she is suggesting?

Tony Venhuizen, a senior adviser to Gov. Dennis Daugaard, said the audits and investigations Daugaard has commissioned were both independent and thorough.

The reviews ordered by Daugaard include a review of

the Governor's Office of Economic Development by a Pierre accounting firm that will go item-by-item through programs that haven't previously been reviewed. That includes the Future Fund, an economic development program that supported Northern Beef.

Daugaard also asked the Department of Legislative Audit, the Legislature's auditing arm, to audit GOED. That audit runs from the summer 2009 through last summer.

Tyler said that time frame is too short. Although 2009 was when South Dakota changed management of its EB-5 program from a state agency to a private company, it had worked with EB-5 investors for years before that. Venhuizen said further investigations could explore that time frame once the existing reviews are done. Tyler said the state shouldn't wait.

Tyler isn't alone as she calls for a more thorough, independent process to take place.

On its Nov. 29 opinion page, the Mitchell Daily Republic wrote:

"We don't believe the public has lost all trust in state government, but we do believe the circumstances surrounding Benda's death, his apparent theft of state funds, and his

dealings with Northern Beef have lessened the public's trust in government and do warrant a closer look.

We suggest appointment of a bipartisan panel by the governor — in addition to but independent of the ongoing state and federal investigations — to thoroughly investigate Benda's death, his conduct regarding the Northern Beef Packers plant both during and after his employment with the state, and any and all related issues. When the investigation is over, a public report should be issued. Benda may be dead, but the public deserves to know what, exactly, he may have done and who else may have been involved."

Approximately a week ago, the Aberdeen American News opined ... "the whole mess around the Governor's Office of Economic Development, the state's role in EB-5 and lack of oversight of its own funding mechanisms point to a growing need for more checks and balances in state government."

Regarding Tyler's idea for a more thorough audit, the American News editorial board wrote: "We agree. It is time for our lawmakers to take a long, hard study at where the money has been going.

In addition, these lawmakers, who last year turned away so many bills promoting open government, need to focus their

indignation at a system of their devising, one that does not shine light on the business of government.

It is a scary proposition to consider how thoroughly some of South Dakota's biggest projects have been funded through the EB-5 program and other means.

Now is the time to walk back and find out just how viable a system it really was for us, and patch the holes in state government that allowed us to get in this muck in the first place."

The Watertown Public Opinion also has expressed concerns about the many questions and too few answers concerning Benda, EB-5, South Dakota Beef and the GOED. "Are the problems associated with EB-5 isolated incidents or are they symptomatic of bigger problems in state government that we know nothing about?" it asks in an editorial published Nov. 25.

There's no way to know if the current ongoing federal investigation will answer questions like these. We believe Tyler's idea, however, is at least a start at trying to clear up the mystery surrounding this complicated, messy affair involving the GOED, EB-5, Northern Beef, Benda, and South Dakota government.

Regarding the search for the truth, we repeat: What will it hurt?

### PLAIN TALK POLL RESULTS

Do you believe Attorney General Marty Jackley's conclusion that Richard Benda committed suicide?

Yes	15
No	15
Undecided	11
<b>Total Votes</b>	<b>41</b>

To participate in the Plain Talk's weekly poll, log on to [plaintalk.net](http://plaintalk.net).

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind.

In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the Plain Talk will accept no

letters attacking private individuals or businesses.

Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Mail to: Letters to the Editor, 201 W. Cherry St., Vermillion, SD 57069, drop off at 201 W. Cherry in Vermillion or e-mail to [david.lias@plaintalk.net](mailto:david.lias@plaintalk.net).

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## The extraordinary average life of Roz Savage

"I had no choice but to find the strength." Roz Savage, ocean rowing champ

The story of Rosalind "Roz" Savage pretty much tells itself. You wouldn't think that the first woman to row solo across three oceans had ever reached rock bottom. And this was right before she pointed the bow of a 23-foot ocean rowboat and began her journey across the Atlantic.

Newly divorced in 2005 at the age of 38, the British-born Savage ditched her day job in London for higher ground on the open seas where for days she would not see land or speak to anyone other than herself.

This daughter of not one, but two Methodist pastors had worked in her office job for 11 years before deciding to take on 20-foot waves, being capsized multiple times and nearly dying from dehydration.

Just reading about her "3,000-mile trial by sea" would make the bravest of land dwellers shutter. During her

### MY STORY YOUR STORY



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first transoceanic journey across the Atlantic in 2005, which took 103 days, 5 hours, 43 minutes, Savage rowed 2,935 miles, consumed 462 breakfast

bars, averaged 12 hours of rowing per day, lost 30 pounds and endured 24 days without communication.

She traveled across the Pacific in three installments over a period of three years. During the first leg from San Francisco to Hawaii in 2008, she clocked 2,324 miles, lost 25 pounds and listened to 62 audio books.

The second stage from Hawaii to the Island of Kiribati in 2009 took 104 days, crisscrossing the Equator twice, losing 30 more pounds and encountering

whales, sharks, dolphins, turtles and squid.

On the third and last leg of her trans-Pacific quest from Kiribati to Papua New Guinea in 2010, her stats were very similar to the first two-thirds, except this time she sighted numerous pirate container ships, which she reports were "far too many for comfort."

Self-described as "a latecomer to the life of adventure," Savage has racked up mind-boggling statistics that literally changed her life.

Today, after 15,000 miles, five million oar strokes and over 500 days at sea in a small craft, she uses her uncommon sea adventures as raw material to inspire people like you and me.

As the only woman in the world to row alone across the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans, the former management consultant has broken four ocean rowing world records, entered The Guinness World Book of Records and has not looked back.

Savage has authored two books: "Rowing the Atlantic: Lessons Learned on the Open Ocean" (Simon & Schuster) and "Stop Drifting, Start Rowing: One Woman's Search for Happiness and Meaning Alone on the Pacific" (Hay House), was awarded the 2010 National Geographic Adventurer of the Year and named Member of the Order of the British Empire.

World records aside, the most compelling part of Savage's accomplishments is that she's a lot like you and me, readily admitting she doesn't have the stuff of which super heroes are made.

"In case you have formed the impression that I am some kind of athlete, adventurer or adrenaline junkie," she purports, "I should make clear at the outset my near total lack of qualifications for this undertaking."

Like all of us when faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles, at times her courage grew slack and her spirit was

troubled. She didn't think she would survive all alone out there in the middle of the ocean with blistered hands, a headlamp as her only light, broken oars, failed satellite communication and bad weather looming on the horizon.

Although, Savage reminds us, "I had no choice but to find the strength."

You would think the net positives of these crazy challenges are not relatable to our everyday lives. Some might even argue the woman had lost her mind.

But Rosalind Savage begs to differ. Now, as she reflects on her thrice transcontinental treks, which have been covered prolifically in the media and on the web, she uses her multiple stories of survival to offer insights on finding happiness through living a meaningful and rewarding life.

She explains, "The ocean forced me to develop courage, tenacity and perseverance to transcend self-imposed limits."