

VIEWPOINTS

SDHSAA resolution isn't enough

Wayne Carney, the executive director of the South Dakota High School Activities Association, wasn't treated roughly.

But he did face a barrage of questions from the South Dakota Legislature's Joint Committee on Appropriations last month.

Legislators raised points about the association being covered by the South Dakota Retirement System, which is for public employees, but not being subject to open-meeting and public-record laws.

Lawmakers also learned that Carney and other top members of his staff receive free automobiles to use, through a corporate sponsorship, and that he receives extra compensation through a variety of commissions ranging from 3 to 5 percent for corporate sponsorships he secures and renews.

Other things committee members learned include association also operates a foundation that was empty until last year, when the directors voted to put \$55,000 into it from excess association revenue and \$10,000 from a refund by the national association.

BETWEEN THE LINES



DAVID LIAS
david.lias@plaintalk.net

They learned about the SDHSAA's vote last year to increase ticket prices. One lawmaker, Sen. Deb Peters (R-Hartford) described the association as "a quasi-public organization" that operates through public funds and conducts activities at taxpayer-funded public facilities. She said its lack of openness contributed to a current controversy over soccer.

The association has legal authority under state law to exist on behalf of public and private schools that delegate to it some of their authority on athletics and other activities.

Carney said the board's meetings are open and the agenda for each meeting is available on the association's web site. He said the audits are now posted.

"We will do what we need to do to be better communicators in

what we do," Carney told the panel in his closing comment.

It became painfully clear during this committee meeting that the association has a communication problem.

We suggest that Carney and the SDHSAA Board cooperate with lawmakers who have introduced legislation that, if approved, will allow the Legislature and the public to more easily be aware of activity's association business.

There are now two measures that attempt to change how SDHSAA conducts itself.

Rep. Charlie Hoffman, R-Eureka, has introduced HB 1141, which would require the association to comply with South Dakota's open-meeting laws.

Sen. Corey Brown, R-Gettysburg, has introduced SB 90, which requires SDHSAA compliance with open-meeting and public-records laws regarding its meetings, and it further requires SDHSAA to publish the annual Department of Legislative Audit report on the association's website and DLA's website.

This bill also adds some additional legislative oversight on the workings of the SDHSAA.

The SDHSAA, created by state law but organized as a private nonprofit, exists in a gray area between public body and private group. The SDHSAA board apparently doesn't believe it is required to comply with open meeting laws. According to news reports, it voted unanimously Tuesday to draft a "resolution or policy to ensure transparency within our organization."

Mike Miller, an SDHSAA board member and the president of the Aberdeen School Board, doesn't think new laws are needed, according to a report in the Argus Leader.

"I think the resolution speaks to what this board is always wanting to do and wanting to be, and that's open and transparent," Miller said. "We don't really feel that it's necessary to legislate what we're going to do. We can police our own house and do a very good job of it."

We don't believe that's good enough. The SDHSAA board would be far better off to cooperate with lawmakers who have introduced legislation requires SDHSAA compliance with open-meeting and public-records laws.

We make this observation after fully taking in all of the

actions of the SDHSAA board on Tuesday. Before passing its resolution promising to be more transparent, it met in a closed meeting, away from the public.

"That's probably the ultimate irony, that (they) drafted a resolution on transparency in closed executive session," Sen. Brown told the Argus Leader. "That would probably be of grave concern to me."

Transparency is a way of protecting fairness and ensuring the common good. When citizens know what their government is up to, they have a better chance of ensuring that decisions treat everyone equally and protect the common conditions that are important to everyone's welfare.

That holds true for organizations like the SDHSAA, too. We urge its board to cooperate with lawmakers, and recognize that in this case, "self-policing" offers very little assurance to the public.

The best way to protect fairness and ensure the common good is to make the board comply with the state's open-meetings and public-records laws.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dismayed

Thank you for the article in the Jan. 17 paper. I thought that perhaps I was the only one saddened to think of losing our old water tower. I agree with you that it has historic value, and belongs in the Vermillion skyline. We are often too quick to knock things down, and in doing so, lose the appeal that a small prairie town has to offer. You referred to it as ambience; I would add serenity, tranquility. It's that peaceful, contented feeling that is not found in a frantic city.

I am also dismayed that this wonderful tone Vermillion has to offer is endangered by the wholesale destruction of so many of our beautiful old boulevard trees. Last year there were over a hundred taken down by city workers, and already this month we have lost over a dozen more. I know that dead trees need to be removed as a liability, but I think that damaged trees could be pruned. We don't bulldoze a house that is damaged, or junk a car after a fender-bender. Trees, which shade houses in summer, and protect from the wind in winter have well documented economic value. We talk about attracting more people to live in Vermillion. I would not have moved back here six years ago if, instead of the beautiful tree-lined streets, I had seen a bare, dusty town.

Sandy Pederson
Vermillion

Save the water tower

In your column a few weeks ago, you expressed your fascination for the old water tower found on the NE corner of Market and Bloomingdale. Built in 1911 and first put into operation in 1912, the water tower has been a fixture in downtown Vermillion ever since. The current structure replaced an earlier elevated wooden water tank located at the same spot and built in 1892.

With the growth of Vermillion came the need for the expansion of the water system for the city. Starting with the Prentiss Park water tower in 1958 and now with the new water tower on the north side of town later this year, the old downtown water tower will no longer be needed for its original purpose. While not needed for water, there are many other functions that it can be used for.

As you mentioned, during the summer months the turkey vultures that hang around the bluff find the water tower as the ideal roosting spot. Located high above the bluff, the water tower allows the birds to take in the sun and soar with the thermals over the valley. Cell phone companies would also find the structure useful to them, allowing for great coverage over both the city and the valley without the cost of having to build a new tower. The 1912 water tower contributes significantly to the historical appearance of downtown Vermillion and stands like a tall sentinel on the edge of the bluff overlooking the entire area. With some renovations, the old water tower could be converted into an observation tower. All in all, the old water tower has served this city well for over one hundred years. It is a historic structure from 1912 that blends in with downtown Vermillion and it can be used for other purposes in the future. In my opinion, it would be a great loss if anything ever happened to it. Save the old water tower.

Tom Thaden
Former president –
Clay County Historical Society
Former Treasurer –
Clay County Historic Preservation Committee



"I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME, DOC...BUT I JUST DON'T CARE ABOUT JUSTIN BIEBER..."

While minding my own business...

"It is never too late to be what you might have been." George Eliot, British novelist

It's been a week of discoveries best described as firsts in my lexicon of "totally awesome." Stories, heretofore, that I had not yet traversed.

All are real-life examples I came across while minding my own business. Some, images of hope, like Seattle Seahawks fullback Derrick Coleman.

As the first deaf player in the NFL, Coleman has redefined inspiration with his courageous and determined journey in a football career that led him all the way to this year's Super Bowl XLVIII.

The success of the former UCLA running back has more than likely empowered every deaf youngster into the stratosphere of "I can do anything."

I first encountered Coleman in the Duracell "Trust the Power Within" ad that has gone viral in recent weeks. Coleman's voice over in the commercial goes like this: "They told me it couldn't be done – that I was a lost cause. I was picked on and picked last.

"The coaches didn't know how to talk to me. They gave up on me – told me I should just quit. They didn't call my name – told me it was over.

"But I've been deaf since I was three, so I didn't listen. And now I'm here with a lot of fans in the NFL cheering me on and I can hear them all."

MY STORY YOUR STORY



PAULA DAMON
paula.damon@iw.net

A powerful parallelism exists between Coleman's life story and the life of a battery—which to me is pure poetry. Unstoppable – this new young superstar allows the most despairing among us to hope again.

Another awesome discovery was a guy I just happened to see riding through the parking lot at Hy-Vee on his belly! You heard me right. He went zipping along on gurney of sorts, which he operated manually. In tow on the rack beneath him was a hefty cartload of groceries.

With no legs and well-built upper torso and upper arms as broad as my thighs, that guy went sailing by as if nothing could stop him. With such determination and spirit, I can't imagine that any jeering or snickering, pointing or glaring would matter to him – not in the least.

As he moved quickly through a sea of parked cars, his purpose and drive were fully on display as testimony to his mighty outlook on life. Little did he know (Or did he?) the strong sense of stick-to-itiveness he had washed over me and others.

Standing in the wake of his positive energy, I was instantaneously

infused with the spirit of "never-give up" – a feeling I've carried with me since.

Speaking of riding, I had another amazing discovery that's fixed way, way at the other end of the "awe" spectrum, as in "awful." While minding my own business, I saw another guy – in same parking lot, same day. And, believe me, I wasn't just sitting there "people watching."

Hurrying along like my usual self, I caught a glimpse of him strutting into the store with his pants riding low, not on his hips, like some do, but midway down his thighs!

Suspended by nothing but his stride, those jeans surely would be down around his ankles in no time at all, I predicted.

Scratching my head and overcome with questions, I wondered how in the world anyone could walk around like that and be comfortable. Let's face it. Iost of us have been in various stages of dress with our waistslines down around our thighs. And we readily testify that it's like walking in a gunnysack bound just above the knees – going nowhere fast.

Unfortunately, when I imagine that young fellow applying for a job or trying to advance in his career, all I can see were the barriers of those low, low riders.

So while this low-riding young man is creating barriers of another kind, the first deaf player in the NFL and the guy on the gurney are both smashing barriers – seen and unseen, real and perceived, physical and emotional.