

VIEWPOINTS

Legislature might be better after the review

By Bob Mercer
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE – The 2014 session of the Legislature that opens Jan. 14 will be the first since the outside review was conducted last summer.

The mood definitely is different. On the day the report was publicly delivered, the staff director, Jim Fry, resigned after 13 years.

Emotions have smoothed since then on the Legislative Research Council staff. The dialogue and interaction between top staff and top legislators became much more open.

The job description for Fry's permanent successor is still being drawn and the hiring of a recruiting firm is still under consideration.

The Legislature will go into the session instead with an interim director at the head of its staff.

Fred Schoenfeld, the former chief of the fiscal staff, was planning to retire altogether in 2014 when he was unexpectedly tapped to fill the director's chair on a temporary basis.

His ascension meant a promotion of Annie Mehlhaff to fiscal chief.

She's brought suggestions intended to address some of the perceptions regarding budget matters that the Legislature is too dependent on the governor's Bureau of Finance and Management.

The openness shown by Schoenfeld and Mehlhaff extends from other senior members of the LRC staff too, such as senior research and legal analyst Reuben Bezpaletz and code counsel Doug Decker.

Decker previously was legal counsel for the state Bureau of Personnel. He's been working on a major revision of the LRC personnel policy.

The outside review found personnel matters lost importance in the past decade.

Overall the review called for more direct interaction between LRC staff and legislators year-round.

LRC staff now will be allowed to provide analysis in closed caucus meetings upon request. This was previously prohibited to preserve non-partisanship among staff.

The review concluded term limits are at the heart of much of the dissatisfaction. LRC staff in caucuses is one step in meeting the desire by legislators for more help.

The 2014 session's first Senate bill is the top reform recommended from that review, which was conducted by staff for the National Conference of State Legislatures.

SB 1 calls for South Dakota to take a page from Kansas in establishing a unified form of management for the Legislature and the LRC staff.

South Dakota has used a split system. The House speaker and the Senate president pro tem – currently Rep. Brian Gosch, R-Rapid City, and Sen. Corey Brown, R-Gettysburg – manage matters during session.

During the nine months between sessions, management is by a 15-member Executive Board, with six senators and seven representatives chosen by their partisan caucuses in each chamber.

The House speaker and the Senate president pro tem get automatic seats. The board members select a chairman and a vice chairman to serve a two-year term.

SB 1 calls for change. The House speaker and the Senate president pro tem would alternate as chairman and vice chairman, one year apiece, starting Jan. 1, 2015.

The board recommended this. The current chair, Sen. Ryan Maher, R-Isabel, is prime sponsor. Lead House sponsor is the current vice-chair, Rep. Lance Carson, R-Mitchell.

The board's decision last spring to seek the review took courage. Results so far seem positive.



PLAIN TALK POLL RESULTS

Do you usually begin the new year by making resolutions?

No. 28
Yes, but my resolution usually fails. 9
Yes, and I'm usually good at keeping them. 2

Total Votes 39

To participate in the Plain Talk's weekly poll, log on to plaintalk.net.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted.

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Guest commentary:

Organ donation: The gift of life

By Gov. Dennis Daugaard

New Year's Day is an occasion to reflect back to what we have accomplished in the past year and think about the mistakes we've made and lessons learned. New Year's is also about looking ahead. Making resolutions. Establishing goals. Hoping, dreaming and planning.

For some Americans, though, their New Year's hope is that the phone will ring soon. They are the 120,000 people who are waiting for an organ transplant – and 3,600 of them live in South Dakota, North Dakota and Minnesota.

A couple of years ago, a very ill two-year-old boy and a young lady who wasn't expected to live to see her 30th birthday received that phone call. The little boy, Keegan, was in need of a liver and Meleah, the young woman, was struggling with cystic fibrosis and needed a pair of lungs.

Andrea, a 16-year-old from a small South Dakota town, was on her way home when she hit loose gravel and her car rolled. This terrible accident tragically took Andrea's life. She was young and was taken from her family and friends much, much too soon.

Not long before the accident, Andrea had decided to check the donor box while she was applying for her driver's license. Andrea's decision gave Keegan and Meleah, along with others, the gift of life.

A year ago, I proposed and the Legislature passed a bill to establish a new online donor registry to make it easier for South Dakotans to register as organ, eye and tissue donors. And it looks like the registry is already beginning to serve its purpose.

Over the past year, there has been a sizeable increase in donor

registration. In 2013 we had more than double the number of new registered donors than we had in 2012 and more than triple the number in 2011.

The day that Andrea received her driver's license, her friends say she wasn't just delighted to have gained her license but that she also proudly announced her decision to register as an organ donor.

This year, I hope more people will visit www.DonateLifeSD.org and make the decision Andrea made. It's a New Year's Resolution we can all support.

Whittle by whittle, you will get there

"The new year begins in a snow-storm of white vows."
George William Curtis, writer

Ask any number of behavioral experts why so many of us fail to keep our New Year's resolutions and they'll tell you we do it to ourselves. We set unrealistic goals in too short of time frames. We don't realize that keeping resolutions requires significant change. And, if we slip or don't achieve our goals soon enough, we easily get discouraged.

Oh, sure, the first few days, maybe even weeks, we manage to be good – bearing white knuckles, sweaty brows and all. But we quickly lose faith, when our weakening willpower takes a hike to some nether land of broken promises and we find ourselves back at square one.

It's not about being lazy or unaccomplished. Not in the least. Truth be told, sometimes

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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different.

Scientific research shows that our good and bad habits are formed by thinking patterns that produce neural pathways and memories. These behavior patterns come into play when deciding, for example, between having a donut that is sweetly calling our name, or that boring old bowl of oatmeal, staring us down.

we're just not ready to lose weight, quit smoking, save money or do whatever. Although, if we want something different, as Dr. Phil says, we need to do something

By choosing the oatmeal over the donut, we create new neural pathways from new thinking, replacing old pathways from our previous stinkin' thinkin'.

So, for any of you making New Year's resolutions, here are some pointers for stick-to-itiveness to help you along the way:

1. Make only one resolution and focus solely on it. Don't boil the ocean by saying you're going to become the next Angelina Jolie or Brad Pitt.

2. Set realistic goals that are specific by narrowing down the pounds you want to shed and time frame in which you want to lose it. Instead of trying to lose 100 pounds in a month, 12 to 18 months would be more like it.

3. Make your resolution a year-long process that you commit to every day. Promising yourself at 12:01 a.m. on New Year's Day that

you're never going to do "that" again and immediately forgetting about it is a recipe for failure.

4. Take small steps toward your goal. Many people quit because what they've set out to do is overwhelming, like saying you'll quit criticizing your husband. Start with baby steps by only doing it behind his back.

5. Assign a friend to help keep you honest and accountable. Hannibal Lecter would not be a good choice.

6. Celebrate your mini successes along the way by treating yourself. No, not with a two-pound bag of Cheetos. Plan a bigger incentive for reaching your final goal, not including the all-you-can buffet at Golden Coral.

7. Stay focused on your new thinking and new behaviors, not on your old way of doing things. Repetitive self-talk really does help. "I will not

chew my toenails in public. I will not chew my toenails in public."

8. Avoid worrying about tomorrow. Stay in the moment and consider one small step you can take each day. Focus on what you can control rather than on what's uncontrollable, like your boss's bad comb-over or a wind chill of minus 70 below zero.

9. Identify how you are feeling emotionally, mentally and physically. Keep a journal and be honest. If you feel like crap, say so.

10. Lighten up. Don't let any backsliding slow you down. Remember, you're only human. Have some fun along the way. Tell a nice clean joke. (What is the best way to carve wood? Answer: Whittle by whittle.)

The best to you in the New Year. May you reach your goals whittle by whittle.

Vermillion

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PLAIN
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Since 1884 • Official County, City and School District Newspaper

201 W. Cherry, Vermillion, SD 57069 • Publication No. USPS 657-720

Publisher: Gary Wood • Editor: David Lias

Published weekly by YANKTON MEDIA, Inc. • Periodicals postage paid at Vermillion, SD 57069.

Subscription rates for the Plain Talk by mail are \$27.56 a year in the city of Vermillion.

Subscriptions in Clay, Turner, Union and Yankton counties are \$41.34 per year.

Elsewhere in South Dakota, subscriptions are \$44.52, and out-of-state subscriptions are \$42.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Plain Talk, 201 West Cherry Street, Vermillion, SD 57069.

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