

VIEWPOINTS

More than ample effort

Let's pretend. Pretend that you visit your bank today to check the balance of your checking and savings accounts, just to make sure the totals are what you expect them to be.

Surprise! There's more money in each account than what your cipherrin' at home earlier that morning at the kitchen table indicates.

What's your initial reaction? Personally, I'd be surprised. And pleased. And, as I stepped out of the bank, with a smile on my face, I'd likely begin to wonder just why my math was so wrong and where that extra money came from. That pleasant feeling likely would be replaced with confusion.

We South Dakotans find ourselves in a similar situation this week.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard, in a press release issued Monday, July 15, informed the state's citizens that we, as a state, are in better financial shape than expected.

The state general fund budget for fiscal year 2013 ended with higher revenues and lower expenditures than budgeted.

Revenue growth for the completed 2013 fiscal year exceeded estimates adopted by the legislature last March by \$13.6 million. In addition, state agencies also demonstrated fiscal restraint, spending \$10.6 million less than appropriated.

In total, the state's financial picture improved by \$24.2 million from the March fiscal year 2013 estimates.

The \$24.2 million surplus was transferred to the budget reserve account as required by state law.

And, consequently, the state's two rainy-day accounts now are at a combined record high of \$158,952,076.

That total of nearly \$159 million is equal to 12.3 percent of state government's general-fund spending from the 2013 budget.

I suppose we should be happy that our state is apparently flush with cash at a time when many states are struggling financially.

All of that revenue didn't just suddenly appear out of thin air, however. There are a host of things at work here, including a high reliance by the state on a strongly regressive tax.

Another factor is the ease with which the state Legislature has, for two years in a row now, not only balanced its budget but also had plenty of money left over in its general fund and in reserve funds.

One reason the state's ledger ends up in the black is the state legislature's willingness to shift many financial burdens onto citizens' shoulders in a variety of ways.

An example: For years, now, the Legislature hasn't adequately funded public education in South Dakota. It has ignored South Dakota law that calls for state aid to education to increase annually by 3 percent or the rate of inflation, which ever is less.

Gov. Mike Rounds, in his last year in office, called for a freeze in state aid, and the Legislature agreed. During Daugaard's first year as governor, it looked like schools would be hit with a 10 percent cut in funding. One-time monies were found to make that cut approximately 7 percent.

School districts have yet to recover from the double-whammy caused by the recession and state budget cuts.

Officials representing various school districts across the state urged a legislative panel within the Legislature's Education Funding Formula Study Committee on June 19 to consider recommending a boost in state financial aid to schools, not just changes in the way money is divided among school districts.

School officials reason that they have not recovered from budget cuts made by Daugaard and the Legislature two years ago to help balance the state budget.

Joy Smolnisky of the South Dakota Budget and Policy Project, a nonprofit organization that studies budget issues, said school districts in the state get about the same amount of funding from property taxes as those in surrounding states. However, state funding per student in South Dakota is significantly lower than in surrounding states, she said. The state's share of school funding was about \$3,000 per student in 2011, about half the average state spending in surrounding states, Smolnisky said.

Patrons of a growing number of public school districts across the state, frustrated with the state's unwillingness to fund public schools financially, have had to raise needed revenue themselves by opting out of the state property tax freeze.

Of South Dakota's 151 public school districts, 66 have opted out, raising additional revenue to pay for salaries and other ongoing general fund costs. The Vermillion School District is in the midst of its second five-year opt-out that provides \$800,000 annually.

We understand the desire to have a "cushion," in our state budget. It's natural to be happy about having a positive balance in our bank accounts, and a wallet that's had a bit of heft to it.

We can't help but be concerned, however, that our state wallet is growing fat at the expense of other programs and other citizens in our state. The examples we've offered are just in the field of education (by the way, tuition at state universities, including USD, will increase about 4 percent for the 2013-14 school year - another burden the state easily passes on to others).

We can only assume that there are other programs in South Dakota reliant on revenue from Pierre that aren't funded adequately by the state so they must, at the local level, either cut programs or find other money sources.

In the meantime, South Dakotans, be happy with a \$24.2 million surplus in the state budget. Be happy that the state's reserve funds have reached a record high of nearly \$159 million.

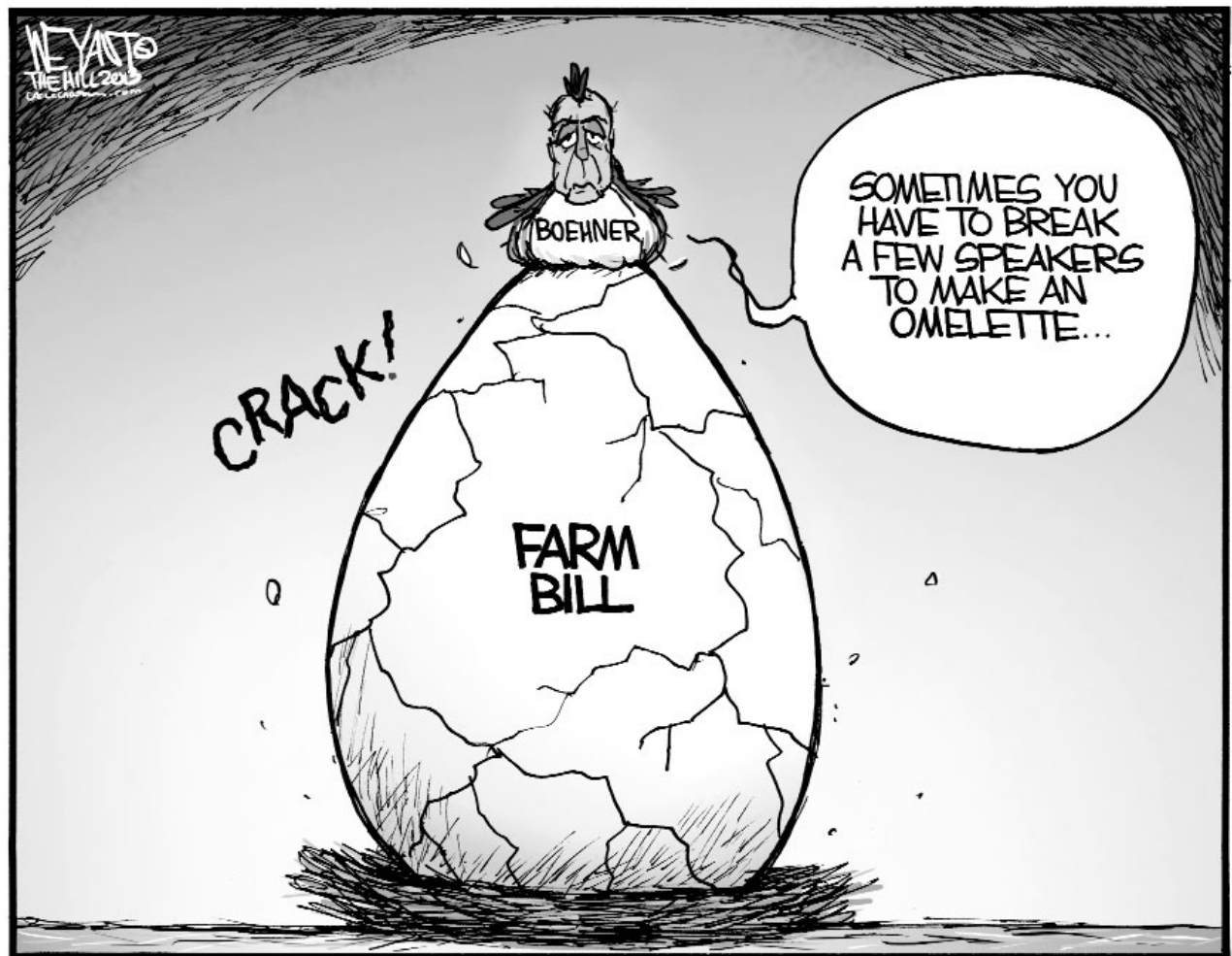
Your hard work, your sacrifice, your doing without, your paying more than should be required in local, highly regressive property and sales taxes and fees and tuition have made all of that possible.

Perhaps the state will see fit to dip into those reserves someday, so our efforts at providing more than ample revenue to state coffers will be rewarded with adequate funding of education and other critically important programs.

BETWEEN THE LINES



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There's no place called 'perfect'

I was annoyed by those two love birds who sat next to me on a flight to Omaha on my way home from a recent trip to the Pacific Northwest.

To begin with, they arrived very late at the gate. And then, they had the nerve to ask buckled-in passengers, who had paid extra to get first dibs on their Southwest Airline seats, to move so they could ...

"Excuse me, sir. Would you mind sitting in that empty seat back there so my boyfriend and I can be together," chirped the girlfriend, who was promptly turned down.

Next, it was the boyfriend's turn. He asked the passenger at the end of my row with a spare seat between us.

"Excuse me, sir. Would you mind sitting over there so my girlfriend and I can sit together?"

"Of course," the guy said, and after a bit of musical chairs on the tarmac, the two love birds snuggled in next to me for the long flight to Eppley Airfield.

It's surprising what you can learn about people when you have no other choice but to sit right beside them at 35,000 feet for two hours and 55 minutes.

It wasn't hard to tell he was a Husker fan by his Husker t-shirt, Husker ball cap, Husker workout pants, Husker watchband and Husker wrist bracelet.

So, I figured he was a Nebraskan. And since I could overhear everything they said; even when they were whispering sweet nothings into each other's ears, I ascertained Omaha was his hometown by his boyish sing-song-y "You're going to meet my family. You're going to meet my family."

That must have really gotten to her. "Ok, so tell me everyone's name and who they are," she blurted with more than a hint of anxiety.

And so began his prepping her for all the introductions, running

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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lost.

"What should I say?" her apprehension now fully on display. "I mean is there anything I shouldn't say? I mean, does anything offend your family?"

"Nope, not a thing," was her beau's reply, which we all know is a lie, since there's bound to be stuff that's taboo at any family gathering.

"Okay, I'll try not to cuss," she sighed a sacrificial promise, as though she would have to take great pains to save them from her potty mouth.

Needless to say, when these lovebirds weren't talking, they were smooching.

During the one and only oasis of silence in the flowery meadow of what appeared to be new love, she asked, "What should I wear?" which I thought was the silliest question any female can ask any male. Everyone knows most guys aren't super fussy about what they are wearing, let alone what anyone else is wearing.

"Whatever," he shrugged predictably. "It doesn't matter."

"No, you don't understand," stressed the future Mrs. "I absolutely have to wear the right thing for the right occasion. I have to. That's me."

I could tell he just didn't get it, as her comment rendered him speechless.

through a long list, starting with his mom, dad, grandparents, and then aunts, uncles, cousins and finally family friends, high school friends, college friends and neighbor friends.

Not sure how she kept track, because I definitely got

frankly, that was the first sign of trouble. In my opinion, anytime a person is obsessed with attire, there's very little room for anything else in a relationship.

"No, really, you don't understand," she pestered. "I need to know what to wear. I'm a perfectionist."

That was the second sign of unrest. If she keeps this up, even if they do make it to the altar, their marriage will not last.

You see, I've been hitched to the same man for 40 years, 10 months, two weeks, six days, 12 hours and 30 minutes. And, there's one thing I do know about staying married for that long - there's no room for perfectionism, which can totally wreck what started out to be the best unions.

As the new couple carried on like a flowing fountain of bliss, I wrestled with my crocheting, occasionally glancing out the window hoping to see God float over the tops of all those billowy clouds and make a divine intervention.

They kissed - again! My eyes rolled - again.

"You're so adorable," she gushed. "Sorry, I don't mean to baby you, but I'm a little bit of a mommy. That's what I do."

Aha, the third danger-sign. Guys don't want a mommy; they want a wife and friend.

Toward the last leg of the flight, he became increasingly glued to his iPhone, and she had to nudge him to get his attention. Another indicator of t-r-o-u-b-l-e - avoidance.

At long last, we landed in Omaha, and that was the last I saw of that poor couple.

Now, nearly two weeks later, I'm still worried about them. Sorry, I'm a little bit of a mommy. That's what I do.

SD EDITORIAL ROUNDUP

Rapid City Journal, Rapid City, July 7, 2013

Wildfire deaths raise profound questions

Death and danger are never far away in wildland firefighting, and that harsh, heartbreaking reality hit the nation hard last week as it mourns the loss of 19 firefighters in an Arizona forest fire on June 30.

The death of the elite firefighters of the Granite Mountain Hotshots marked the nation's biggest loss of life on a wildfire crew in 80 years. The 20-man crew based out of Prescott, Ariz., lost all but one man, who was moving a truck when his team members were trapped in the inferno.

The tragedy devastated that town, but it also hit hard in the Black Hills firefighting community, where many people fondly remembered Kevin Woyjeck, 21, one of the young men who lost his

life. Woyjeck was a California native who spent the 2012 firefighting season as part of the Bear Mountain Hand Crew in South Dakota. Some of those who knew him here will travel to a national memorial service this week and also plan to attend Woyjeck's funeral in California.

We extend our deepest sympathy on these unimaginable, staggering losses to Woyjeck's friends and family, and to all those who knew and loved each of the other 18 lost firefighters, as well.

Ironically, the human cost of fighting forest fires was brought home to South Dakotans again just one day after the Arizona deaths. Families and fellow airmen of the four North Carolina Air National Guard crew members who were killed in the 2012 White Draw Fire near Edgemont gathered on the anniversary of the July 1 fire to dedicate a memorial interpretive site honoring

them. The crash killed Lt. Col Paul Mikeal, Major Joseph McCormick, Major Ryan David and Senior Master Sgt. Robert Cannon. Two crew members, Chief Master Sgt. Andy Huneycutt and Senior Master Sgt. Joshua Marlowe survived.

We applaud the private donors who raised about \$4,000 for the interpretive site in time for the anniversary dedication.

And we hope that we never have to erect another like it in this state.

That may well be an impossible wish, given the inherent dangers of fighting wildland fires. No matter how well trained, how well-equipped or how careful a fire crew is, there are quite simply times when a fire's erratic nature can surprise and overwhelm even the most cautious of them. And surely, the 19 men of Granite Mountain were among the most skilled and proficient wildland firefighters who ever lived.

But we call on federal and state fire officials to honor the memory of the men lost in Arizona with not only their customary and thorough investigation of this tragedy, but also with broader questions about U.S. wildland fire policies and procedures currently in place. Was this crew sent into a dangerous situation where the chance they might perish was too high? We must answer the question of how an entire company could suffer such a fate. An examination of just what is, and what should never be, expected of crews when homes and property are on the line is called for. More profoundly, America must answer this question: Do we taxpayers put saving forests or private property or livelihoods above the life and safety of the human beings we ask to protect our homes and businesses from wildfire? There will be time enough for those questions in the weeks ahead.

But first, we mourn.