

VIEWPOINTS

Is it time to intervene?

I know last week I blabbed quite a bit about the taxes you and I paid in the last year that has allowed the state of South Dakota to end the fiscal year with not only a \$24 million positive general fund balance, but also a record high \$159 million in the state's two "rainy day" or reserve accounts.

I think it's human nature, especially here on the plains of South Dakota where we must deal with a great deal of uncertainty from year to year, to prepare for the worst, and be ready for that rainy day.

I'm still waiting to see that "rainy day" hit South Dakota.

It's not as if fate hasn't tried to make us think that day has finally arrived.

For over a decade now, we South Dakotans (along with other states) have had to deal with one calamity after the other.

When terrorists attacked our nation in September 2001, I thought our rainy day had arrived.

It sure seemed like storm clouds were brewing when the Great Recession began in 2009.

Parts of our state were literally under water for some time during the massive Missouri River flooding in 2011. Thought for sure that "rainy day" we've been saving for had hit then.

Things seemed bleak last year, too, when record high temperatures and a severe drought burned crops in much of the state. Those were certainly bad times that one would think fit the definition of a "rainy day."

Despite all of those things happening, our state's reserve funds – the piggy banks that the governor and Legislature like to keep out of reach – contain a near record amount of coin.

The nearly \$159 million presently in the state reserve accounts is equal to 12.3 percent of state government's general-fund spending from the 2013 budget.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard is credited (or blamed), according to your point of view, I guess) for getting South Dakota's fiscal house in order by with his 10 percent across-the-board cuts in state funding during his first year in office.

His predecessor, Mike Rounds, proved to be tight-fisted, too.

In January 2009, as the nation reeled from the affects of the Wall Street crisis and the severe recession that followed, Rounds requested the Legislature make more than \$46 million in spending cuts. He told lawmakers that without those revisions to the state budget for 2009 and 2010, the state would be \$133 million short for the next 18 months.

At that time, Rounds proposed cutting the state fair, the food tax refund program, adult Medicaid dental services, the State Children's Health Insurance Plan (SCHIP), nursing home client cost share, the state Division of Arts, the Archeological Research Center program, the Teachers' Compensation Assistance Program (TCAP) and the School for the Deaf, which would be taken over by an outside agency.

It certainly felt like South Dakota's rainy day had finally arrived.

Except for one thing.

Rounds said in 2009 that he did not intend to utilize the state's budget reserve fund.

Hmm. That's sort of a head-scratcher.

I've attended enough school board and city council meetings to know that the local government budget process can be long and complicated. On the state level, it must be much more difficult. It would be nice, however, for Pierre officials to more fully explain that \$159 million in reserves, and whether parts of it will ever be used.

According to the "South Dakota Budget Primer," compiled by the South Dakota Budget and Policy Project, South Dakota has four "special funds" – namely, the budget reserve fund, the property tax reduction fund, the Dakota Cement Trust Fund and the Health Care Trust Fund.

Recent news reports note that the \$159 million in reserves is the total in two rainy day accounts. Which must mean we are socking away extra money in more than just the budget reserve fund.

Plus, the budget reserve fund, according to the primer, "can be no greater than 10 percent of general funds appropriated for the previous year."

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

So, it would appear that the budget reserve fund has hit its 10 percent limit, and extra funding is being squirreled away somewhere else. It would be nice if state officials in Pierre would more fully explain exactly where our money is.

I would almost go as far as recommending that South Dakota set a cap on its reserve funds. Right now, we appear to have a "make-believe" cap – that 10 percent limit on the budget reserve fund. Which, once hit, means extra money is, apparently, simply funneled into some other reserve fund.

Idaho calls its reserves a "stabilization fund." By law, it is capped at 5 percent of the state's general-fund budget. Beyond that point, surpluses stay in the state's general fund. Where, I would imagine, they are put to good use.

I realize that rainy day funds are a good thing to have built into a state budget. The flexibility such a fund provides can be critical. Caps on such funds may prevent states from building them up to adequate levels.

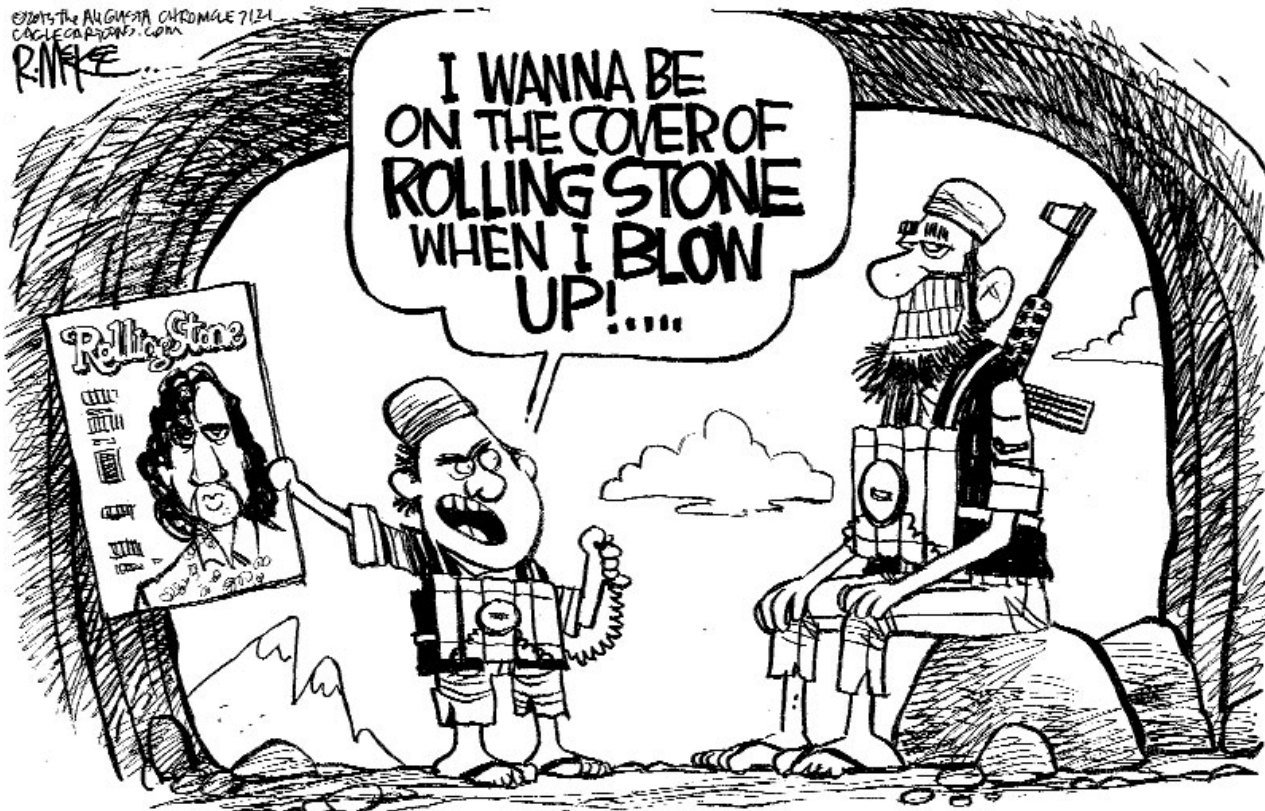
However, South Dakota has been hit by one "rainy day" after the other in the last decade or so, and our lawmakers and governor appear to be hoarders of state revenue.

Is it time to call for an intervention?

BETWEEN THE LINES



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State of ancient wonder, rare beauty

When traveling in the U.S. and abroad, natural wonders peak my interest more than any other tourist attractions. Ancient land formations, prehistoric animal remains, wildlife and climate all play an important role in my recreational enjoyment.

So, whether you are passing through or are a native of South Dakota, here's not all but some trivia about the rare attractions unique to the Rushmore State ...

Located in Perkins County in northwest South Dakota, Lemmon is home of fossilized remains of life 50 million years ago consist of the world's largest petrified wood park.

The geographical center of the U.S. is Belle Fourche, in Butte County, also in the northwest part of the state.

South of Belle Fourche are the Black Hills or Paha Sapa, or "hills that are black," named by the Lakota Sioux Indians. The mainly ponderosa pine-covered hills rise several thousand feet above surrounding prairies and appear black from a distance.

Near Sturgis, Bear Butte, Mato Paha, or "Sacred Mountain," is the origin of many Native American legends. Easy to spot, rising 1,400 feet above surrounding prairie, Bear Butte was used as a landmark by the plains Indians. Today, it is considered a sacred place by plains peoples.

In the Black Hills is Custer State Park, home to 1,500 free-roaming bison, weighing up to 2,000 pounds. Bison were essential to the Lakota Sioux Indians, who relied on bison, "tatanka," for survival.

West of Custer, Jewel Cave has more than 120 miles of surveyed underground tunnels. The third-longest cave in the world, Jewel Cave is named for sparkly calcite crystals.

North of Hot Springs is Wind Cave with the world's largest display

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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their primary context in the world. This National Natural Landmark is the only in-situ, bones left as found, display of fossil mammoths in America.

In the Black Hills, Harney, 7,242 above sea level, is the highest point in the U.S. east of the Rocky Mountains. Starting at Sylvan Lake, I have twice climbed Harney Peak's easily walkable and breath-takingly scenic trails.

In the center of Black Hills National Forest, the 9,824-acre Black Elk Wilderness, in the Norbeck Wildlife Preserve, was named for Black Elk, an Oglala Lakota holy man.

Seventy-five miles east of the Black Hills is Badlands National Park, nearly 244,000 acres of eroded buttes, pinnacles and spires among the largest protected mixed grass prairie in the U.S. The Badlands also have the world's richest Oligocene epoch fossil beds, dating back 23 to 35 million years.

Sage Creek Wilderness, a 22-mile backcountry route through the Badlands, is where the most endangered land mammal in North America, the black-footed ferret, was reintroduced.

Famous to paleontologists, Faith, in Northwestern South Dakota, is where several Hadrosaur,

box work, a rare underground formation along more than 82 miles of mapped passageway.

The Mammoth Site in Hot Springs has the largest concentration of Columbian and woolly mammoth bones discovered in

Edmontosaurus annectens, duckbilled dinosaurs, were excavated on a ranch north of Faith. One of the largest, most complete and best-preserved Tyrannosaurus Rex was excavated near Faith.

Near Garretson in Eastern South Dakota, Split Rock cut deep gorges through Palisades State Park. According to geologists, the Sioux quartzite spires are 1.2 billion years old. Glaciers deposited a thin layer of debris on top of the quartzite with beds of dark red pipestone between the layers. This is one of the few areas in the nation where pipestone is found.

Also east of the Missouri River from Aberdeen to Watertown, Brookings to Huron and Milbank to DeSmet, South Dakota's Glacial Lake, in the northeast, were formed by receding glaciers over 20,000 years ago. One of them, Medicine Lake, has one-and-a-half times as much salt as seawater.

Near Mitchell, the Mitchell Prehistoric Indian Village is the remains of a six-acre prehistoric Indian settlement, a National Register and National Historic Landmark site.

One more S.D. fact to boast about, South Dakota is a very sunny state. Ranked the 15th sunniest place in the nation with over 200 days of sunshine annually, Rapid City has the most days of sunshine in the state with approximately 230 sunny days each year. Huron is second sunniest spot in South Dakota, with roughly 211 days of sun; Sioux Falls has 208 and Aberdeen with 202 days of sunshine annually.

Sources: S.D. Department of Tourism, www.50states.com, www.crazyhorsememorial.org, www.sdglacierlakes.com, www.mitchellindianvillage.org.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Flawed recycling

To the editor:

I've been a believer in efficient recycling since a kid cleaning the gutter in my grandparent's barn and spreading the manure in the fields and crushing tin cans during WWII. But, when the city passed a residential curbside recycling ordinance in 2008, LeRoy Backhaus, myself, and many others said the ordinance was incomplete and flawed.

Some examples: The ordinance applies to only part of Vermillion. Single family and multi-family housing up to five units are required to pay a monthly fee whether they set

recyclables out or not. This leaves our apartments over five units, mobile home parks, businesses, group homes, and more.

The effective date of the ordinance was Dec. 1, 2008, but the city did not start service until September 2009. The city violated its own ordinance for nine months. Who cares? Two points: There was no one on the council heady enough to change the effective date and does that mean we each can violate an ordinance for nine months? The entire city should have been phased in years ago.

Better yet, the recycling ordinance should have been single-stream with wheeled containers with lids that

latch, can be manually or mechanically dumped and residential collection should be every other week.

The city has four satellite drop off trailers, but none in the Central Business District. Fifty percent of the drop off trailers have the wrong address on the official website of the city. Maybe city hall needs a few more assistants.

If people don't speak up, government will run over us.

Paul Hasse
Vermillion

LETTER TO THE EDITOR POLICY

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 should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. 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.

Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.

Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail to: Letters to the Editor, 201 W. Cherry St., Vermillion, SD 57069, drop off at 201 W. Cherry in Vermillion, fax to 624-4696 or e-mail to david.lias@plaintalk.net.

POLL RESULTS

If a proposed initiated measure to raise the minimum wage in South Dakota makes it to the November 2014 ballot, will you vote in favor of it?

Yes	48
No	20
Undecided	2
Total Votes	70