

Is Hot Springs the best place?

They were once commonly known as old soldiers' homes – a military veteran's retirement home, nursing home, or hospital, or sometimes even an institution for the care of the widows and orphans of a nation's soldiers, sailors, and marines.

South Dakota has one. The Dakota Territorial Legislature, in 1889, passed a bill establishing the Dakota Soldiers' Home to be located in Hot Springs. The bill carried an appropriation of \$45,000 for construction. The object of the home was to provide the care and subsistence for veterans and their wives and widows who meet eligibility requirements for admission to the home.

The cornerstone of the first building was placed on Nov. 11, 1889. This building remains in service and houses the home's administrative offices and recreational facilities.

This "old soldiers' home" will be the major topic of discussion when the South Dakota Legislature meets in special session on June 22 to deal with cost overruns in the construction of a new State Veterans Home in Hot Springs.

The Legislature earlier this year approved a bill authorizing the spending of \$41.3 million in state and federal money to build the new home. But Daugaard says when bids from contractors were opened recently, the lowest bid was considerably above projections. He says that will lead to a total project cost of \$51.3 million.

The special session is needed because the state can't wait until the next legislative session in January to deal with the issue.

The governor, while in Vermillion last week, told reporters that he expects state lawmakers will grumble about the extra funding, but will approve the needed expenditures.

We hope, during their short time in Pierre this month, that lawmakers thoroughly take into account what is about to happen. Because there's no undoing a \$50 million investment once it's made.

And we're not convinced Hot Springs is the best place to make that investment.

In fact, we're not convinced, in today's modern era, that an "old soldiers' home" is the best way to provide health care to our veterans.

We have to believe that state lawmakers and other government officials had all of this in mind, too, when it became apparent that the current Hot Springs facility had grown inadequate.

A 2009 study conducted for the South Dakota Department

BETWEEN THE LINES



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pointed out that the Hot Springs location does not provide uniform access to veterans across the state. The study notes that over the next 20 years, South Dakota's veteran population will shift towards Rapid City and Sioux Falls. It also estimates that the number of veterans requiring long term care services will double in the Rapid City region by 2030.

The study concluded that replacement of the existing state veterans home with a new 100-bed skilled nursing facility could result in net savings to the state, while improving service to veterans.

We realize the state is shackled, somewhat, to a host of federal regulations and standards while dealing with this issue. It must follow federal guidelines because nearly half of the new construction's cost will be paid by funds coming from Washington, not Pierre.

We're happy that veterans will be getting a new facility. We're happy that a more modern structure and equipment will, once completed, save the state substantial money and provide a greater level of health care.

We can't help but believe, however, that keeping the veterans home in a rather isolated area of southwest South Dakota is not the best way to serve our veterans.

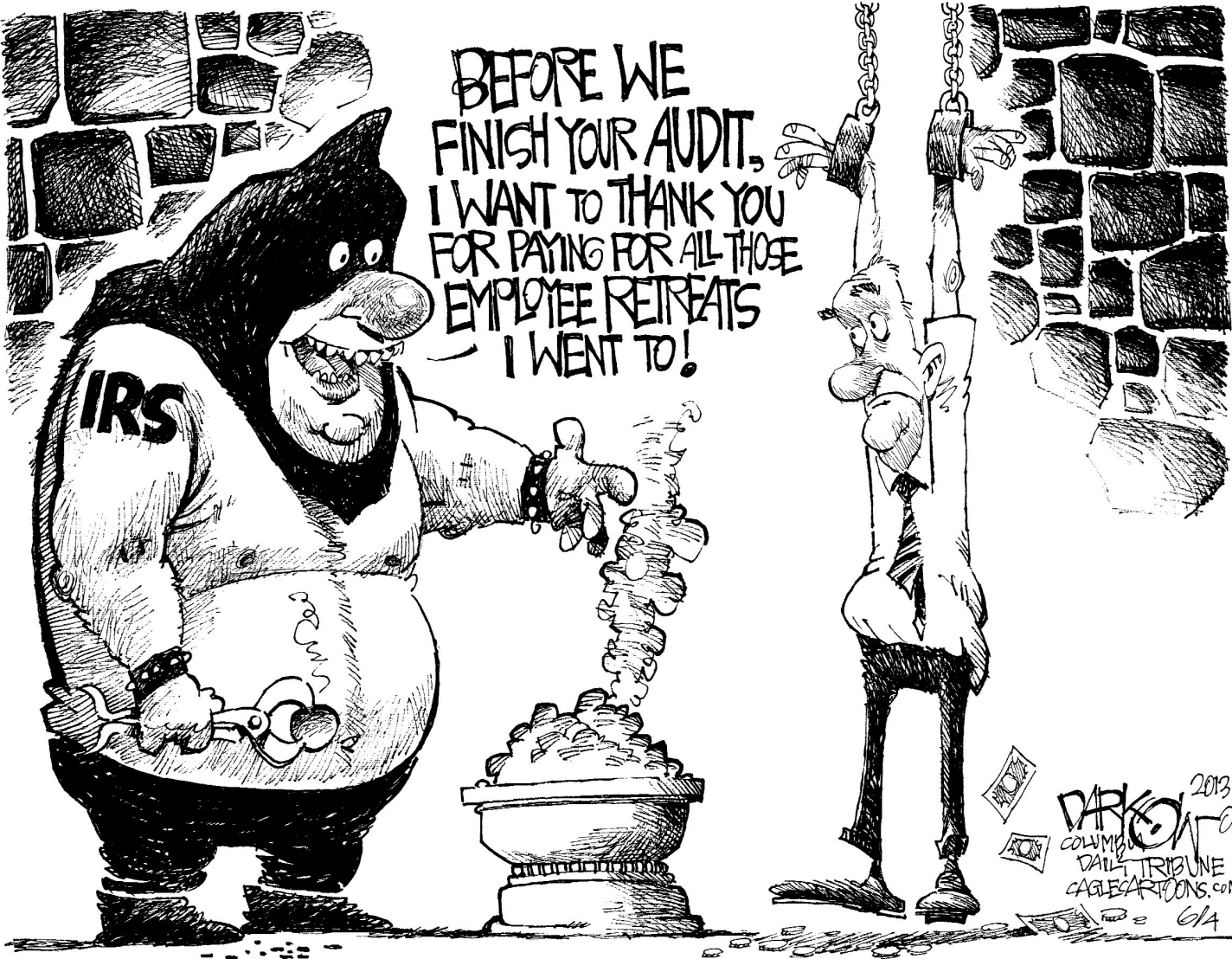
The study noted that the number of veterans in western South Dakota over the age of 85, which numbered 1,043 in 2005, is expected to reach 1,903 by 2030. Minnehaha County will see a 20 percent rise in veterans over the age of 85.

We hope there will be sufficient explanations made, when this issue is soon addressed in Pierre, that justifies keeping the facility in Hot Springs rather than moving it to Rapid City, where a new state veterans home could be developed as an addition to a private, existing health care establishment there.

of Military and Veterans Affairs noted that a new facility for veterans would be needed if the state was to stay in the business of providing long term care to veterans.

It also

VIEWPOINTS



Damon: That's gratitude for you

Today is Tuesday, May 28, 2013, the day after Memorial Day. I'm in a restaurant on Highway 20 way out West in Chadron, NE, a former railroad town surrounded by miles of grassland and high plains.

Making my way to a booth, I part waves of chatter on livestock values, plumbing fittings and the Memorial Day head count yesterday at three area cemeteries.

After plopping down and unpacking my notes and laptop, I notice an elderly couple one table over with their heads bowed – the wife is mouthing a barely audible prayer.

The husband doesn't seem to move much, perhaps feeling buoyed by an oxygen tank hanging on him as a satchel to one side. Tubes extending from it wrap around both of his ears, travel over his sagging cheeks and disappear into his heaving nostrils.

From his pained look, I conclude the life he once knew is gone. His eyes, glazed and despondent, search for memories of a more felicitous time, when he went about freely with bravado and grit, not tied down to that darn breathing machine that's doing its darnedest to keep him going.

After she sanctifies their little bite, she proceeds to do all the talking. While tearing open ketchup packets and squirting out

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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is a sign he's really listening, "but warm it up in the microwave the next day and it's not the same." She reaches to dab a splatter of food on his chin.

I am trying not to lean too much into this snapshot of someone else's folks whom I'm appreciating and, well, you might say, honoring, since my own parents have been gone forever, it seems. Mom died on '05, Dad in '07.

So I'm trying to distract myself by drafting a new story – that is until these other bits of conversations spray all about like a fountain of updates, tidbits, musings and whatnot.

enough for both of them to share, she glances out the window and tries predicting whether or not those dark clouds will really send rain or are they just bluffing. And then, after running through a list of errands, she begins fussing over what to cook for dinner.

"Lamb stew is really good the first day," she assesses, as if his silence

At the table behind me, a group of construction workers:

"Wallpapering the walls! He was up on the ladder. In his 70s or something like that. The other one was in his 50s. He steps off, thought he was on the last step and fell. Broke his hip."

Sitting kitty-corner from me, a collection of elderly women:

"My husband always says, 'I can see your nipples through that blouse.' And I say, 'Most everybody has them, so what does it matter?'" They all chuckle.

"Well, tell him to stop looking and he won't see 'em no more." This sets the entire table into a fit of laughter.

From the table next door: "Remember when the kids used to take you out to supper for a hot dog at Wal-Mart? Oh, dear!"

"I like their cheese sticks."

"Aren't they hot?" "No, they're good. And they're cheaper than they are at Arby's, but my husband said those potato chips they have at Arby's are good. They make their own potato chips, you know."

Overheard from the table directly ahead: "That's gratitude for you. I went out to the cemetery and there was a small bundle of flowers on Dick's grave."

Guest commentary:

Student interest rates – the sequel

By Sen. Tim Johnson (D-SD)

We saw the movie last summer on the threat of raising federal student loan interest rates, and it had a happy ending when Congress acted to prevent it. This summer, the interest rate sequel is showing, and the ending is uncertain. On July 1, interest rates on new federal student loans are once again set to double.

This would hit South Dakota students and families hard. Without congressional action, nearly 35,000 students in South Dakota will rack up an extra \$1,000 in student loan debt next year from increased interest costs. At a time when too many students are already graduating with enormous debt loads, it makes no sense to make it harder for students to finance their education and manage their debt.

Increasing numbers of students are finishing their education with crushing student

loan debt loads. Others are reluctant to pursue college and career training due to a lack of financial resources. Incredibly, student loan debt now exceeds \$1 trillion. Americans now owe more in student loans than credit card debt. This creates financial hardship for young people just as they are beginning their careers. It can also create a barrier for young people who want to start a family, buy their first car or become a homeowner, which could hinder our economic recovery.

Last spring, I sat down with students from Southeast Technical Institute in Sioux Falls to talk about what a doubling interest rate would mean for them. They told me a rate hike would make it harder for them to complete their schooling and would likely deter students from pursuing their education goals. In recent months, I have received an outpouring of letters, emails, and phone calls from young people

and parents across South Dakota about the need to prevent interest rates from doubling on July 1.

The Senate is poised to vote on legislation that I have cosponsored: the Student Loan Affordability Act. This legislation would extend for an additional two years the current 3.4 percent interest rate on federal student loans. The bill is fully paid for through closing several existing tax loopholes. This extension would give Congress time to review policy options that have been proposed to overhaul our federal student aid programs and rein in tuition costs that dramatically outpace the rate of inflation.

The House of Representatives has taken a different approach by passing legislation that would force student borrowers to pay more than if Congress failed to act by July 1. The legislation fails to lock in low rates and could

submit students and parents to higher fluctuating interest rates.

Making smart investments in South Dakota and our nation's students is critical to our continued economic competitiveness. Helping students attain a post-secondary education is not only a good investment in their future, but also a worthwhile investment in ensuring that America remains competitive in the world economy.

I welcome a debate that looks at reforming our federal student loan programs over the long-term. But time is running out for today's students in South Dakota and around the country. Let's give this summer's interest rate movie sequel a happy ending. Congress should take immediate action to prevent the interest rates from doubling on July 1.

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.

PLAIN TALK POLL RESULTS

Now that summer has nearly arrived, how often will you visit a farmer's market to purchase fresh fruit, vegetables and other items?

Occasionally	19
Often	16
Never	10

Total Votes	45
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To participate in the Plain Talk's weekly poll, log on to plaintalk.net.

Thank you, Vermillion

Dear editor,
I want to thank the community of Vermillion for their kindness to me over the last four and half years as news director of Classic Hits 1063 and ESPN

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Radio 1570. I am moving to Billings, MT, to be with my wife and pursue some new career opportunities. I want to thank my family and my children, Brittany, Miranda and Brianna for their love and support. To everyone I've worked with, you have made me a better person. To all

the city, county and school employees I've interviewed, or games I've done, I will never forget the great time I had. Go Tanagers and Yotes!

Robert Pfund

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