



David Lias
Between The Lines

Surely, a less painful cut could be considered

I don't know about you, but I'm getting weary of the South Dakota legislative process.

Specifically, I'm getting a bit tired of state lawmakers clearly defying the wishes of most of the citizenry.

The latest word from Pierre is that South Dakota Public Broadcasting is being targeted. Again.

I believe this happened last year, too. A quick perusal of my files has been unable to confirm that. But I seem to remember something similar happening last year. Or the year before.

I must admit I didn't really worry about it too much. The proposed cut never became reality. I just figured lawmakers learned the error of their ways after the backlash they caused the last time they threatened public broadcasting.

I suppose since we're in business in Vermillion, where the South Dakota Public Television studios are located, some readers may think we may be, perhaps, a little oversensitive about this topic.

I've personally gotten to know people associated with SDPB pretty well. They're active in the community. And I don't know anyone who doesn't respect and appreciate the professional effort they devote to their jobs.

Except for, I guess, some lawmakers.

According to a letter sent this week to the Friends of South Dakota Public Broadcasting by Julie Andersen, executive director of SDPB, it appears in the final days of the legislative session that public broadcasting in South Dakota is under threat of a major funding cut, perhaps as much as \$500,000 – the equivalent to about 12 percent of the funding it receives from the state.

Perhaps we have legislators that don't like to watch themselves on "Statehouse" every night while they are in session. They don't like the relevant, local discussions provided on such SDPB programs as "Dakota Digest."

Maybe they don't like to listen to Garrison Keillor. Or Charlie Rose. Maybe "Frontline" and "Clifford The Big Red Dog" are just a little too deep for them. Maybe they prefer the bias of Fox News to the straight-shooting "PBS Newshour."

Maybe they've concluded that Ken Burns' just doesn't know anything about filmmaking after watching his documentary, "The National Parks: America's Best Idea."

Who knows?

Andersen notes that the state provides funding for SDPB's statewide broadcast transmission system and infrastructure which is used to broadcast television and radio programming and web stream content online. State funds pay the electric bills, purchases and maintains broadcast equipment, pays salaries of SDPB employees and other costs. Money donated to SDPB, including money pledged during membership drives, is used to pay for programs and program-related services.

Hopefully, by the time you read this, public backlash will have been so great that this funding cut will be averted. We know times are tight; that lawmakers need to scramble to dig up revenue for everything from education to highways.

But, in the scheme of things, \$500,000 is a tiny little ding to the state's budget. Especially, when we keep in mind that we're a state that likes to sit on a boatload of cash – a rainy day fund, so to speak – and we still sit on it, even when it seems to be pouring outside.

Among the various revenue reports available to the public are the state reserve trust funds from 2001 through 2009. These reserves are a mish-mash of accounts, created either by the Legislature, or by us through statewide elections.

There's a property tax reduction fund, a health care trust fund, an education enhancement trust fund, a Dakota cement trust fund, and a budget reserve fund.

Total up all of these rainy day funds, and you come up with a fairly substantial amount of money. The total hit an all-time high in FY 2007, when it reached \$952,560,942.

As of last September, the total of all of these reserve funds was just under \$760,000,000.

We know the state runs a pretty tight ship. And that the governor had his eyes on these various reserve funds to help us all squeak by yet another year with a balanced budget.

But with reserve fund totals that are getting somewhat close to hitting a billion dollars, we have to wonder why a \$500,000 cut in SDPB is even being considered.

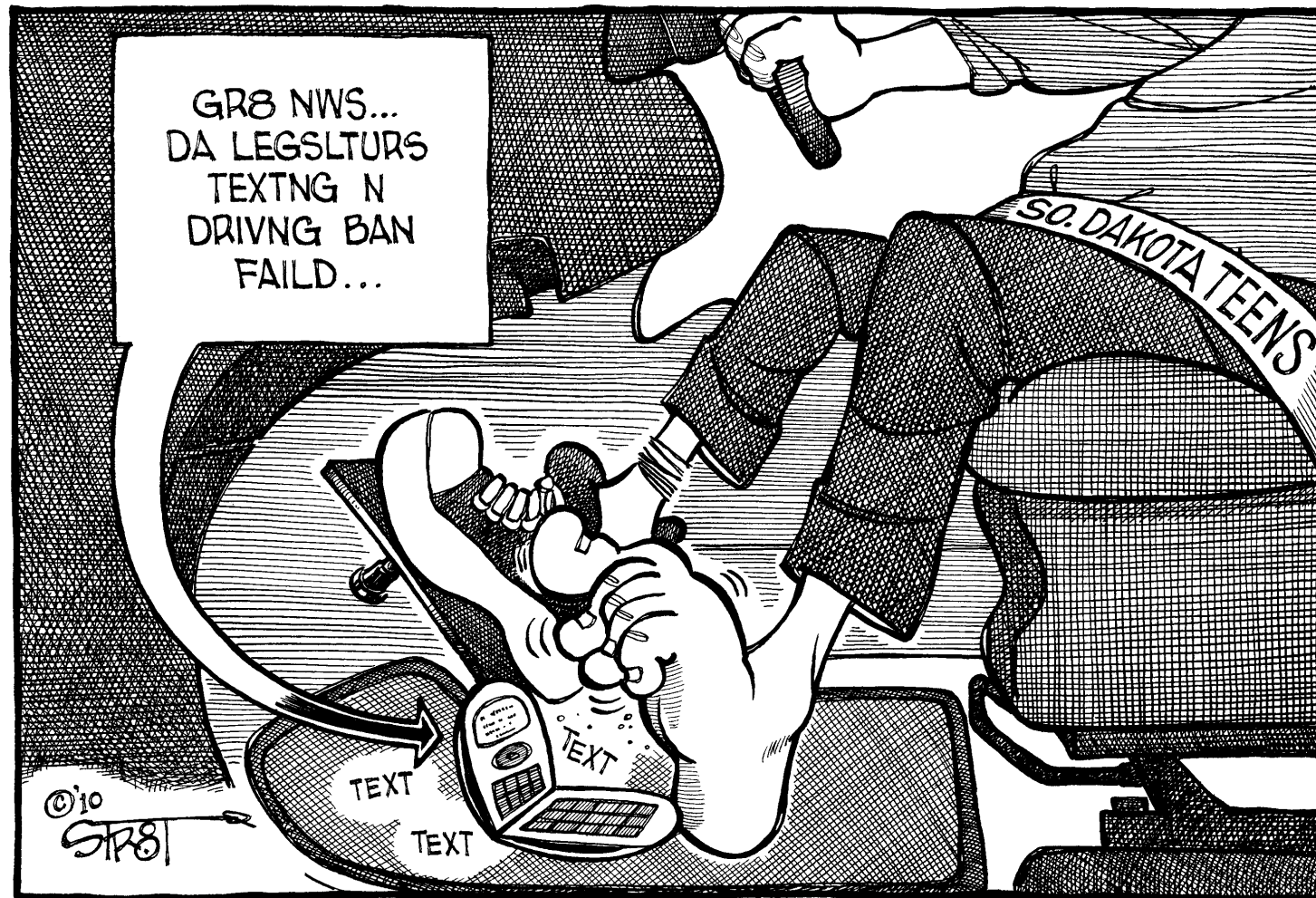
I find myself shaking my head at the notion of another threatened cut in the SDPB budget, especially since earlier in the session, legislation that would have saved the state a considerable amount of money by cutting state lawmakers' pay from \$6,000 to \$4,200 annually for the next two budget years was quickly killed. That measure alone would have created a savings of about \$380,000.

A second measure that would have eliminated out-of-state travel for lawmakers was also defeated in committee. That measure would have saved about \$400,000 of state funds over two years.

Those two measures died because their opponents said South Dakota lawmakers need to attend national meetings to help influence federal policies.

And, the opponents noted, a cut in legislative pay would prevent many people from running for the Legislature because they could not afford to be away from their jobs during the legislative session.

It would be nice if lawmakers who are so worried about their annual salaries and travel costs would show the same type of concern to their constituents who 1) enjoy watching public television and listening to public radio, and 2) who don't mind the fact that part of the money they pay in state taxes every year helps fund South Dakota Public Broadcasting.



Bob and friends competed in unique 'winter olympics'

Now that I'm out of the hospital, we can return to the weekly column since last week was a re-run.

We have snow piled up in the yard higher than an elephant's belly. At least two United States senators from the South still do not believe in global warming and question Al Gore's motives for it. One legislator even took his family to the White House lawn and built an igloo and called it Al Gore's new home!

The hockey games in the Vancouver Olympics reminded me of the games we played on the frozen Marne Creek. We chose up sides and armed each player with a club – the better to beat our opponents with. The puck was an empty Carnation milk container which became jagged

and sharp as the game wore on. The object was to hit the can in the direction of the goal – it didn't matter if we used a so-called hockey stick to take a swipe at an opponent's overall clad leg. In fact we were duty-bound to hurt anybody on the other side.

We didn't skate like the Vancouver guys did. As a matter of fact only the rich kids had skates or double-runner models.

The final score was tallied

by the amount of blood which was shed, or teeth that were broken off.

We played other games, too. We had snowball fights which ended up when somebody put a rock in a gob of snow. We sent several kids home crying "foul."

We had forts although we didn't much use them. We ganged up on the little ones early to get them out of the game.

We went on cross country

hikes, and our snowshoes were a collection of anything which would keep us from sinking into the drifts.

I can remember one kid who had shoes made out of barrel staves. They didn't help much to keep him from getting bogged down in the snow. They worked best when it got slushy.

All I know is that the televising of the 2010 Winter Olympics in British Columbia, Canada was totally unlike the stuff we called our own Winter Olympics.

We didn't have music or pretty girls doing triple axels on the ice wearing pretty costumes instead of overalls like we wore!

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Bob Karolevitz
Writer At Large

Falling into place by shaking it off...

"On your knees, you look up you get strong...wipe your hands, shake it off...then you stand...every time you get up, one more small piece of you starts to fall into place..." Stand by Rascal Flatts.

I have a soft spot in my heart for the Winter Olympic Games, especially for women's figure skating. When I was 12 years old, I taught myself how to ice skate by watching the 1964 Games on TV.

It was the year Dutch figure-skating champion Kjoukje Kijkstra of the Netherlands struck gold in Innsbruck, Austria.

I remember being perched way too close to the black and white picture tube, taking copious mental notes of her twists, her turns, her solid drives forward and her curvy strides backward.

Wanting to dance on ice just like Kijkstra, I studied her every move as she leveraged her body and glided around the glassy rink – the way she bent her knees, lowered her head and maneu-

MyStory YourStory



Paula Damon
Columnist

vered her heels, toes and arms all in one glorious flow of athleticism.

The end of her performance signaled the beginning of mine. I wasted no time heading for the ice to mimic her, hurrying a bit, thinking I may forget the images I carried with me.

With a pair of skates slung over my shoulder, I stomped through winter's long snowy shadows to Chautauqua Lake, one block straight down the hill from my childhood home in Lakewood, NY.

Arriving at the encrusted shoreline, I situated myself on a large rock smoothed by lapping waves now rendered still by cold air.

After wrestling ice skates onto my feet, I stood and steadied myself on dull silver blades. Ever so slowly

and with abundant awkwardness, I inched myself onto the frozen plane. With no one else around, I was free to live out my skating fantasy. Ankles bending, knees aching, I clumsily forced my feet to move, titting right, then left, right, left, right, left,...

During many wobbly practices, my dream of one day gliding across the ice with some semblance of style and grace held me captive.

Spending hours stomping, skidding and marching across that bumpy rink, I carried a mantle of Kijkstra's greatness. She was my supply. Her victory dwelt inside me. Nothing could discourage me.

With relentless hope and unchanging images of Kijkstra, I learned how to skate

forward, backward and eventually progressed to half-turns and then full twirls.

And now watching the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, as I approach the age of 60, I am 12 again. I am perched too close to the television. My heart is in my throat. I see Yu Na Kim of South Korea win gold. I observe the courage of Joannie Rochette of Canada win bronze. I am taken up once again by a most powerful force that makes me believe I can do anything.

A resident of Southeast South Dakota, Paula Damon is a national award-winning columnist. Her columns have won first-place in National Federation of Press Women, South Dakota Press Women and Iowa Press Women Communications Contests. In the 2009 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contest, Paula's columns took three first-place awards. To contact Paula, email pauladamon@iw.net, follow her blog at www.my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on Facebook.

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REPORT FROM PIERRE

By District 17 Sen. Ben Nesselhub

The Senate was busy this week taking final action on all remaining Senate bills as Tuesday was cross-over day, the day all bills must pass the house of origin. With only two weeks left in the 2010 Legislative session, the budget has become the major priority of the Legislature and the debate over the budget is beginning to intensify.

The first week of the Legislative session the Democratic Caucus released its plan for handling the state's budget problems. The plan included capping state spending at 3 percent or the rate of inflation whichever is lower. County governments and school boards in the state are currently confined to this spending cap, but the state government is not.

The plan also included across the board cuts to state agencies and departments. Another priority was stopping the growth

of full time state employees. I am very bothered by an attempt to hide some full time equivalents (FTEs) through HB 1052. This bill would exempt students that work for a state institution in some capacity other than work study from the count of FTEs.

The Democratic Caucus's budget proposal also included consolidation of state departments, specifically the office of State Treasurer and the Commissioner of School and Public Lands. Yet, this proposal along with nearly all others we offered were killed by the majority party.

With only two weeks left in the session, we still have heard no solid plans on how the majority plans to handle the budget. I have a lot of affection and respect, both personally and professionally, for the leadership of the Republican Party. I try hard to stay away from partisan politics, both in Pierre and in my articles, but this

is absolutely irresponsible. Year after year, budget issues get pushed to the last few weeks of the legislative session. In difficult financial times like these, the Legislature should not be waiting until the last minute to formulate a plan for the state's budget.

Determining the state's budget is one of the most important tasks of the Legislature. The next few weeks will be filled with intense debate over how the taxpayer's dollars should be spent. When dealing with your money, it is important that the Legislature take the time needed to make responsible spending decision. I will attempt to do just that in the next few weeks.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any suggestions or concerns in the next few weeks of the session. I can be reached at sen.nesselhub@state.sd.us or at my home phone, 605-624-6178.

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