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Vermillion



PLAIN TALK

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District 17 State Sen. Tom Jones addresses constituents Saturday morning during a cracker barrel legislative meeting held in Vermillion's city hall. Also seated at the table are Steve Howe, executive director of the Vermillion Chamber of Commerce and Development Company who served as moderator, Rep. Nancy Rasmussen, and Rep. Ray Ring.

(Photo by David Lias)

Building SD, Medicaid discussed Sat.

By David Lias
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District 17 Sen. Tom Jones told constituents at a legislative Cracker Barrel meeting Saturday that the state Legislature will likely approve a \$1.3 billion budget for 2014 by today (Friday).

"The \$1.3 billion is general fund money – it's our revenue, our sales taxes. If you take the entire number, which we don't have a lot of control over, it's about \$4.1 billion that the state of South Dakota will be working with," he said.

The numbers come easily to Jones, who serves on the Senate's

Appropriation Committee.

Rep. Ray Ring told the Vermillion audience that he believes the single most significant accomplishment of this year's legislative session will be criminal justice reform. "After that, I'd have to say that I don't think it's been a particularly productive or rewarding session. I'm trying to stay positive."

Ring said he is disappointed that the House Transportation Committee, on which he and Rep. Nancy Rasmussen sit, killed legislation that would have further regulated teen driving in the state.

"We're still trying to get Medicaid expansion, and I realize there is a week left, but I haven't seen too much

movement on that, unless there is something happening with the leadership," Ring said.

Ring said he is disturbed by the lack of support for education at all levels in the Legislature, particularly for K-12 education.

"And, we're shifting more and more of education funding to the property tax in various ways," he said.

Building South Dakota

Discussion turned to Building South Dakota, an economic development incentive plan that had just been introduced in Pierre two days before Saturday's meeting. South Dakota currently has no incentive plan because a previous program that

refunded construction taxes for large industrial projects was allowed to expire on Dec. 31. A replacement plan suggested by Gov. Dennis Daugaard was rejected by voters in the November election.

Republicans and Democrats have worked for the past two months to find a compromise to help level the playing field with other states that do a better job recruiting large projects.

South Dakota charges not only a 4 percent sales tax on construction projects, but also a 2 percent contractors' excise tax on gross receipts. Few other states have a contractors' excise tax, so construction is cheaper elsewhere.

The new plan introduced at a bipartisan news conference last week would refund part or all of the state sales tax paid by projects of more than \$20 million that would not located in South Dakota without such an incentive.

The contractors' excise tax collected on those projects would be placed in the Building South Dakota Fund so the state can reinvest in future projects. The new fund would also get a portion of unclaimed property that the state receives from abandoned bank accounts.

The plan also incorporates a strong

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Police ask parents to look out for drug

By Travis Gulbrandson
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The Vermillion Police Department is asking for parental vigilance after two juveniles were found to be in possession of a synthetic drug called 25I.

"The best way for us to approach this type of situation, we feel, is to get the information out to the parents in whatever way we feel that we can and issue a call to them to let them know that the best thing they can do is talk with their kids about this, talk about the dangers that are associated with this type of thing," said Capt. Chad Passick.

A hallucinogenic, 25I is most commonly ingested through either snorting or smoking, although Passick said it also can

be distributed on blotter paper.

According to a story from WWBT NBC12 out of Richmond, VA, the drug led to at least five overdoses among teens in that community in February 2012.

Virginia's Lt. Jennifer Reese was quoted as saying those who used the drug were prone to "violence, depression, they were unaware of their person, place and the time."

"We also had one that was experiencing seizure activity," she said.

That is why Passick wants to get the word out to parents and kids.

"If you've researched it, you see the posts on You Tube of the kids who are actually high on this stuff," he said. "They make it out to be a good experience and a safe experience, and

unless parents are aware of this, we're not able to offset that message."

While he could not give the specifics of the local case because there were juveniles involved, Passick did say two juveniles were cited.

"We found them to be in possession of easily-identifiable drug substances, also in addition to what we found as 25I," he said. "It's my understanding that in visiting with them, we were able to determine what this substance was. Then through further research we were able to confirm it."

Passick said local officials had not heard of 25I prior to this incident, but added that use of synthetic drugs is on the rise, due in large part to the legality of some of them.

"The laws have struggled to keep pace with the synthetics," he said. "They're only recently coming around to the perspective of actually declaring broader bases of substances illegal, so that the derivatives are also illegal."

The current problem is that although "product A" may be illegal, a "product B" with similar effects could be made from the same source if that substance remains legal.

"What legislatures are beginning to do is simply declare those underlying substances illegal so that when 'B' comes along it's already contained in that," Passick said.

Regardless of whether or not they are legal, Passick said people need to understand that

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City may step in after state texting ban fails

By Travis Gulbrandson
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According to information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 15 people are killed each day and more than 1,200 people are injured in crashes that were reported to involve a distracted driver.

In 2009 alone, more than 5,400 died and approximately 448,000 more were injured.


One of the biggest distractions for drivers today is the use of text messaging, which is why the Vermillion City Council is now at work on a texting-while-driving ban.

The decision to begin the process was made at a meeting held Monday afternoon, following the state legislature's failure to pass similar measures.

"I think that if the state law eventually happens, it will be because enough cities are going to have done it and it'll create a tipping point," said council member Kelsey Collier-Wise. "It's going to have to come from the municipalities that have to deal with it a little bit more."

Council member John Grayson agreed, saying, "I think we should take a

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