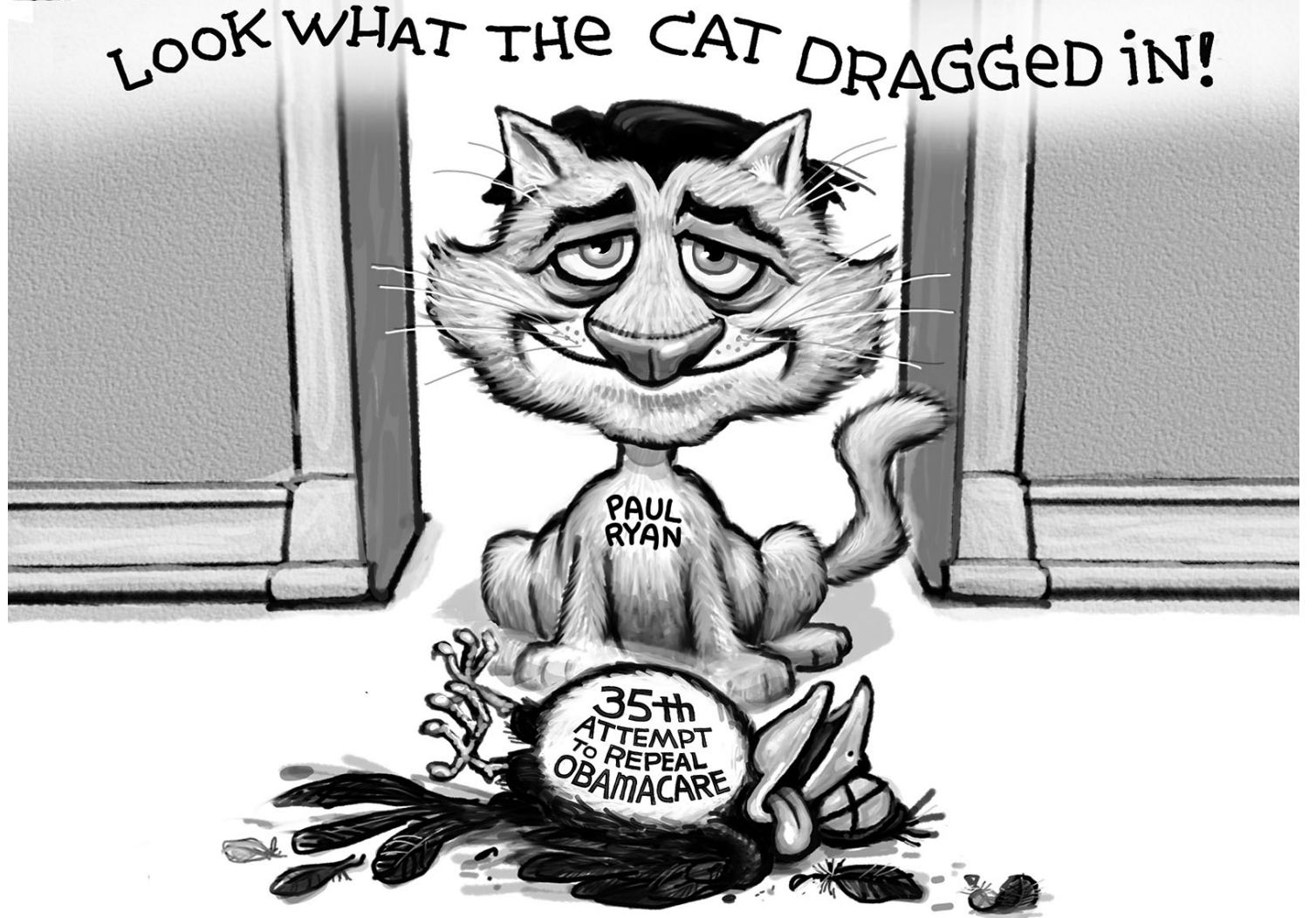


Maybe Big Ag should grill lawmakers



Wow. It's supposed to warm up to 50 degrees plus by the end of this week.

Before you know it, we'll be leaving our houses each morning in short sleeves and will be cleaning up our outdoor grills in anticipation of some delicious, outdoor-prepared burgers, steaks, hot dogs and bratwurst.

Except, right at about the time we all may be itching to throw something on the grill – in early April when we know warm weather is here to stay – the full effects of sequestration will kick in. And that may, or may not, have a bearing over whether there's any fresh meat on store shelves when grilling season arrives.

Although federal budget cuts were scheduled for March 1, it could be months before a threatened shutdown of U.S. meat plants would occur because of a furlough of meat inspectors, according to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. Vilsack said work rules vary for USDA employees, who get from 30 to as many as 120 days, or four months, notice of impending layoffs.

"I'm not sure what it is in the food safety area," Vilsack told reporters at the annual USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum earlier this month after warning that a two-week furlough of all inspectors may be unavoidable.

USDA has raised the prospect of the furlough repeatedly in late February as the nation was on the brink of going over the fiscal cliff – the self-imposed \$85 billion in federal budget cuts agreed to as part of a budget deal back in 2011. They were cuts that were never expected to happen, because, it was thought at the time, Congress and the White House would surely come to their senses by then and work out a deal to avoid the cuts.

As far as our outdoor grilling prospects this spring, we may be in good shape, even if the sequestration lasts a long time. Sounds like we have between a one and four-month cushion – the amount time meat inspectors must be given notice before being laid off.

Of course, if Washington still hasn't gotten it act together after

a month or two or even four, things could start getting dicey. This game of budget chicken could result in the meat industry temporarily shutting down. If meat and poultry inspectors are furloughed, meatpackers and processors can't ship beef, pork, lamb and poultry meat. An estimated \$10 billion in production would be lost during a two-week furlough and consumers could see higher prices and empty shelves as a result, Reuters reports.

BETWEEN THE LINES



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I'm not too worried, yet. There's not a whole that Joe and Jane Citizen can do to influence members of Congress and the White House to stop this tomfoolery, but

politicians will surely sit and up and listen to big ag corporations.

Tyson Foods, for example. Tyson is the second-largest food production company in the Fortune 500, the largest meat producer in the world, and according to Forbes one of the 100 largest companies in the United States. And, it likes to throw money around to Congressional campaign funds each election cycle.

One could speculate that members of Congress will not want to see our nation's food supply disrupted, and they'll especially not want to tick off the likes of Tyson and other big ag companies.

It would nice if Washington's primary concern, while contemplating food supply/safety, would be our nation's farmers and the general citizenry. Money speaks volumes, however, and no doubt the people who work on Capitol Hill will respond quickly if corporate America complains loudly enough.

Legislative report:

Session ends amid flurry of activity

By Sen. Tom Jones
District 17

The final week of our 2013 session has finished in a flurry of bills, amendments, and monetary decisions beginning on Monday and ending Friday.

In the Senate Appropriations Committee on Monday, we passed HB 1060, which we "back-filled" the 2012-13 fiscal year. Many dollars were used to pay debts occurred during the year that were not in the original bill.

One of the major adjustments that was made was taking out of the General Fund \$5 million that was to pay for two corporations that enlarged or just entered South Dakota. Instead, these obligations are to be paid from the "Futures' Fund".

As you already know, these dollars, if taken from the General Fund, would reduce dollars available for two major areas

which are dear to me: Education and health care.

We also passed HB 1184 which gave South Dakota a new state park to the tune of \$2 million, \$1.5 million for a new State Game Lodge in Custer State Park, and \$500,000 for an extension to the Mickelson Trail in the Black Hills. This bill was bumped around quite a bit. The above numbers were decreased to \$1 by the Senate and passed to the House.

The House, in turn, returned the bill back to the Senate Appropriations Committee in its original form. The amendment to the bill passed in the Appropriations Committee 5-1 with me being the dissenting vote. Then the amended bill passed our committee 5-1 with me again being the dissenting vote. These millions of dollars are taken out of the General Fund.

PLAIN TALK POLL RESULTS

Should South Dakota help provide prenatal care to poor women regardless of their citizen status?

Yes	29
No	27
Undecided	3
Total Votes	59

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

"The true value of a human being can be found in the degree to which he (or she) has attained liberation from the self." – Albert Einstein

This season we're in – Lent – is a time of going without for most Christians. Cloaked in a hue of ought-ness, questions and statements on what we have given up for Lent sound through doorways and down hallways.

This is when Christians try practicing penance through some sort of fasting, beginning on Ash Wednesday, the day after Fat Tuesday, and leading to Easter. It's supposed to be a dutiful exercise that recalls Jesus' 40-day fast in the wilderness.

Although, instead of freely giving over our indulgent ways to a heavenly cause, we mournfully relinquish some of our pleasures, maybe one or two, with a good amount of anxiety and cautious calculation.

However holy and righteous our white knuckled sacrifices may be, we really do appear inherently narcissistic. Instead of seriously self-imposed suffering, we employ as much convenience as possible in "going without." We bargain with our sweet tooth and dicker with our compulsive cravings.

Rarely do we fast from what would make us downright miserable, like coffee, cigarettes or alcohol.

For this very reason, I haven't given up anything consumable for many years now. It just never seemed real to me. Not so as a youngster, when giving up something edible, like chocolate or bread, wasn't a choice, but a mandatory obligation of my faith, including meatless Fridays. The more we gave up, the

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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holier we would become, or so I thought.

Today, many decades removed from that place, the call to guard my words and thoughts, rather than banishing the candy dish for six weeks, sirens in my Lenten life – a much tougher task, for sure.

Well-intentioned pastors encourage the notion that our struggles through fasting and prayer can lead to sorely needed self-discovery, producing in us virtues

like selflessness, generosity, kindness, faithfulness and forgiveness.

Mingled with our spirit of self-sacrifice, pulpit stories and Bible lessons – imprints handed down through generations – beckon us to give up even more than we could have ever bargained for: gossiping, judging, criticizing, complaining and the like.

Unfortunately inquisitorial, all too often such Lenten routines negatively evoke our ever-so-weak human condition, causing us to feel trapped and forsaken for all eternity.

In a perfect Christian world, if we truly observe this season of sobriety from our ills, we would entirely turn over our sinful nature to a higher power, happily casting off our preferences under a sacrificial hue.

However blessed it may seem - this period on the Christian calendar admittedly is quite burdensome. Drudgery, Lent sends us on a

vexing, miserable sojourn. Facing the cross, confronting our worldliness, we tangle with temptation in every crook and cranny – at every turn.

Tamped down from the get-go, we toil through, marking off the days until Easter Sunday, when we will emerge supposedly gaunt and threadbare, peering through our sacrificial veils.

No matter what we have abstained from, whether food, fun or foul play, we become alien to our otherwise material, impulsive existence. Soldiering on, we trod. Our gaze selfishly fixed, not on the cross, rather on Resurrection Sunday, when once again we will rejoice, raise our glasses and devour baskets full of sweets.

Although funereal and cheerless is our plight, how do these 40 days encourage us on another level?

Coaxing us out of cranky slumber, this season of penitence coincides with springtime, when our frozen spirits begin to thaw and the happy arrival of longer days and shorter nights descends upon us as a sweet homecoming.

Even as soaked snowflakes amass downward, generations of migratory birds embark on a long trek northward. Some species relinquish rest and nourishment the entire journey, casting a shadow of doubt on our convenient attempts at fasting.

Look skyward! A fluttering river flows, pressing onward to summer places, where many will give birth. Others will pass away.

Oh, Lent, sacred grove of sacrifice, quicken our resolve. Hasten our journey toward a resurrection life.

Greetings from Pierre:

Legislative session comes to a close

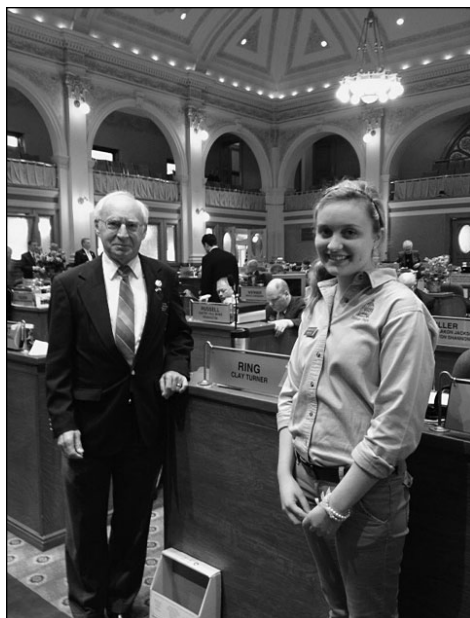
By Ray Ring
District 17

The main run of the 2013 Legislative Session ended late Friday night, March 8. We will return to Pierre on March 25 to consider Gov. Daugaard's vetoes, if there are any. This week the Joint Appropriations Committee adopted its final revenue estimates, then divided up the money available for the rest of Fiscal Year 2012-13 and all of Fiscal Year 2013-14.

I was pleased to have Epiphany Knedler from Vermillion as another hard-working House intern. This week's interns experienced a House schedule that was quite a bit different from the normal. During the last week, we had more recesses while conference committees tried to reconcile bills that the House and Senate hadn't been able to agree on. Interns still stayed busy copying and passing out bills and amendments as they arose, sometimes at the last minute.

Providing adequate funding for education was a primary goal of the Democratic Caucus from the first day of the session right down to the end. The Appropriations Committee provided (and the Legislature approved) an additional \$5.8 million (about \$45 additional funds per student) to schools for the current fiscal year, to be distributed before June 30. No doubt districts appreciate whatever the state provides, but receiving "one-time" funds in the last couple months of the school year makes budgeting very difficult. We need to find a way to provide more reliable, ongoing funding and rely less on one-time funds.

There were many attempts to improve school funding, right down to the last amendment offered by Democrats on the last day, just before the General Funding Bill passed. Regrettably, only the original 3 percent requested in the governor's budget was approved for 2014. This raises the Per Student Allocation (PSA) by \$135 per student, to \$4,625. (Inflation was actually 3.2 percent but



Epiphany Knedler, from Vermillion, is pictured with Rep. Ray Ring. She served as a legislative page.

(Courtesy photo)

the law says 3 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is less.) To put that amount into perspective, the 2008-09 per student allocation was \$4,642, so the FY14 amount is \$17 less per student than five years ago! We can and must do better for our students!

Both chambers also enacted a new "Building South Dakota" economic development policy that promises to be a significant change from previous economic development programs. First of all, the bill guarantees that no money will go into the Building South Dakota Fund if regular General Fund expenditures are not funded first. This means that the per student allocation to schools, cost and enrollment

adjustment for Medicaid providers, and inflation adjustment for state employees must be provided before any revenue would shift from the General Fund to attracting new companies. It also recognizes that economic development requires that we provide for the needs of the workforce by requiring that over half of the Building South Dakota Fund go to workforce education (including support for English language learners) and to support low- and moderate-income housing.

The new law authorizes refunds ("reinvestment payments") of some or all sales tax paid by new companies if "the project would not have occurred in South Dakota without the reinvestment payment." The recipient and amount of these payments are public information, along with data on the number and average wages of the jobs created. This is a significant departure from previous programs and from the large projects program the voters rejected last November. Previous programs provided automatic refunds, even if the project would have occurred in South Dakota anyway. The proposal rejected by the voters would have taken money from the General Fund whether or not education and Medicaid were funded. This program was developed cooperatively and is endorsed by both parties' leaders and promises to be much more transparent than previous programs. I think it is an encouraging development.

These successes notwithstanding, I still feel the Legislature fell short in other respects. The governor has recommended a task force to continue to study Medicaid expansion. As I made clear in earlier columns, I had hoped we could follow the example of so many other states and settle this issue during the session. I still believe we need to more adequately fund education and Medicaid. The failure to include pregnant immigrants and to raise the Medicaid income limits for all pregnant women is also very disappointing. I continue to hope that these worthy programs will be adopted sooner rather than later.