

The skewing of the political landscape

Following Tim Johnson’s announcement Tuesday that he had decided to end a political career that has spanned nearly four decades, I had to take a moment, upon returning to the office, to go back in time.

I turned to the November 1986 Plain Talk, certain to find a big story splashed across the front page telling the world of Johnson’s election to the U.S. House of Representatives.

His win was mentioned, mainly in a headline on the front page of the Nov. 5, 1986 Plain Talk that reads, “Johnson takes U.S. House easily.” The story devoted its first paragraph to stating that Johnson defeated Dale Bell, a Republican from Spearfish, in a short story dealing with local county commission and legislative races.

In his hometown, at least, Tim Johnson’s Congressional career began very quietly. His press conference in Vermillion this week, in which he announced his pending retirement, was the opposite, garnering attention from across the state and nation.

This short trip back in time got me to thinking about how much the political and technological landscape in South Dakota has changed over the years.

Technology has made the voting process easier – for the people who have the task of counting the ballots after they are cast.

Ironically, the same can’t be said for the simple task of casting a ballot. Back in the 1980s (and I’m really stretching my memory here) I believe you merely had to mention your name to a poll worker. When she found that, yes, you indeed were registered, you were handed a ballot to fill out. Pretty simple.

Today, in South Dakota, you must present photo identification before you are allowed to vote. The process has become a bit complicated.

Prior to the 2006 election, no state ever required a voter to produce a government-issued photo ID as a condition to voting. Indiana in 2006 became the first state to enact a strict photo ID law, a law that was upheld two years later by the U.S. Supreme Court.

After that, it became more difficult to vote in this country. And in just the last year or so, voting requirements have gotten tougher across the nation.

The first voter ID law was passed as early as 2003, but momentum has picked up in recent years. In 2011 alone, legislators in 34 states introduced bills requiring voters show photo ID – 14 of those states already had existing voter ID laws but lawmakers sought

to toughen statutes, mainly to require proof of photo identification.

South Dakota currently is lucky – to an extent. We are a “non-strict photo ID state,” – meaning South Dakota voters are requested to show photo ID but can still vote if they don’t have one. However, they likely may be asked to sign affidavits affirming their identity or provide a signature that will be compared with those in

BETWEEN THE LINES



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a “major legislative priority.” Aside from Rhode Island, all voter ID legislation has been introduced by Republican-majority legislatures.

An analysis by News21 in August 2012 also found that lawmakers proposed 62 photo ID bills in 37 states in the 2011 and 2012 sessions, with multiple bills introduced in some states. Ten states have passed strict photo ID laws since 2008, though several may not be in effect because of legal challenges.

More than half of the 62 bills were sponsored by members or conference attendees of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a Washington, DC-based, tax-exempt organization.

Civil rights groups note that voters without a driver’s license or the means (a birth certificate or Social Security card) to obtain free ID cards at a state motor vehicles office could be disenfranchised. (South Dakota’s Indian reservations quickly come to mind.)

They claim that ALEC pushed for photo ID laws because poor Americans without ID are likely to vote against conservative interests – a claim that authors of the Voter ID bills deny.

Groups like ALEC, it appears, are doing their best to find every conceivable way to give Republicans an advantage in 2014. Had the political playing field been so unfairly skewed nearly three decades ago, we South Dakotans may have been robbed of Tim Johnson’s long, distinguished service.

VIEWPOINTS



Find answers to troubling questions

“God’s glory on tour in the skies, God-craft on exhibit across the horizon. Madame Day holds classes every morning, Professor Night lectures each evening. Their words aren’t heard, their voices aren’t recorded, but their silence fills the earth: unspoken truth is spoken everywhere....” – Psalm 19:1-2, The Message, Eugene Peterson

Wet. Slippery. Sopped soil and sidewalks. Melting piles of snow leave behind crusty dingy-white mounds barely noticeable. Rain drives hard barreling through warming air.

Where ice once stood, puddles form, mirroring the slightest movements, sending concentric circles rotating forever outward.

We are on watch with ears perked, olfactory glands on high alert for first signs of spring. Sounds of robins chirping and fluttering. Mourning doves cooing and calling. Cardinals whistling and singing. All forming a concerto of change, a symphony of promise.

Glory to new life, waiting underneath drenched snowy gridlock. Tree branches, once frosty, now jeweled with heavenly glaze.

Winter melt delivers a provocative supply of zeal for us poor souls whose drudgery it is to check off the days from last bloom to first bud, from virgin snow to late thaw, from final flock to returning procession.

Once barren roots, barely hanging onto a characterless existence, sport new shoots now grafted to our transforming hearts. Cheerily plying along, we hail this season as

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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overwinter by crawling into bed at early darkness, staying covered and forlorn while night howls overhead.

Spring thaw, even though cold, presents a convoluted of answers to troubling questions, a healing balm to aching spirits, restitution for tired ways.

Look, see spring’s elbowing short days to the back, enlisting forth the migration of life, calling to arms a warming hue, enlarging our sense of renewal, quickening our resolve.

Sighing pines shake off their snowy shawls, nobly stretching forth, once brittle, now warmth afoot, waving in with pliable coniferous reaches.

Of a noble and dominant lineage, spring flattens cheerlessness, forcing chronic crankiness to go away – far, far away.

Even though snow squalls may flit and fly about her stage, this season, colorful and clear, snubs wintry algorithms, fixing our

it calls forth oceans of snow geese and waterfowl of innumerable varieties.

Such signs cheerily remind us that we thoroughly and quite readily elect to speedily abandon sly old winter.

Prying open the door to newness, this season of green and bright enables sorrowing souls to once again replenish.

No longer will we overwinter by crawling into bed at early darkness, staying covered and forlorn while night howls overhead.

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Even though snow squalls may flit and fly about her stage, this season, colorful and clear, snubs wintry algorithms, fixing our

sights, untempered, on embracing, not escaping life.

Handily managing such hopeless cells of our past, we soak up intoxicating nuances of promise, happily whistling through any and all intonations of our own morbidity.

Yet, even while strewn remnants of winter’s bluster attempt to convince us otherwise, we arrange our dreams in single file, lining them up at springtime’s budding entry before us.

Spring thaw, even though cold, presents a convoluted of answers to troubling questions, a healing balm to aching spirits, restitution for tired ways.

Look, see, she’s elbowing short days to the back, enlisting forth the migration of life, calling to arms a warming hue, enlarging our sense of renewal, quickening our resolve.

Clothed in rebirth, Brother Sun extends his towering aim more directly toward Mother Earth, sharply reacquainting us with our inner compass, advising us to go further, courting us to proceed, tempting us to believe once again, inviting, “Will you, please?”

Hear, now, new life on tour, silencing winter’s growl by uploading morning with birdsong melodies vaulting us into revelation, directing us toward life, not away it.

Of a noble and dominant lineage, spring flattens cheerlessness, forcing chronic crankiness to go away – yes, far, far away.

Houston trip has economic potential

If you want people to visit, you first have to invite them. That’s what a Rapid City group did recently when they traveled to Houston to meet with their travel and business counterparts.

The group of about two dozen business and civic leaders flew to Houston to promote the Rapid City area as a tourism destination and a developing energy sector with connections to North Dakota’s booming Bakken oil fields. They met with Houston travel agencies about Black Hills tourism and held roundtable discussions with business representatives to sell Rapid

City as an economic development opportunity.

It helps that United Airlines will begin seasonal daily flights between Rapid City and Houston on June 6 following a successful trial of the air connection last summer. Rapid City travel and economic development officials would like to convince United to continue the Houston flights year-round. Houston is United Airlines’ largest domestic airport hub.

The trip’s cost was paid by the companies, Rapid City Economic Development Foundation, South Dakota

Tourism, Black Hills Badlands & Lakes, Black Hills Air Service Partnership and other entities.

Ben Snow, president of Rapid City Economic Development, said he didn’t expect immediate results from the trip and was taking the long view of a possible Rapid City-Houston connection. “It takes years sometimes to develop things to a point where a company’s ready to make a move or develop a satellite office,” he said.

We like the idea of exploring Houston’s potential as a tourism and economic partner. It could pay off in the

future in a big way.

Trying to persuade United to continue the seasonal Rapid City-Houston flights and possibly expand it to a year-round connection also is a worthwhile effort. Rapid City’s economy relies on strong air travel connections.

Like many business opportunities, it may take some time before anything comes from the Houston visit. Kudos to the Rapid City business group for making the Houston trip and extending an invitation to make a return visit.

– Rapid City Journal, Rapid City, March 13, 2013

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

Do you believe U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson should seek re-election in 2014?

No	49
Yes	29
Undecided	5
Total Votes	83

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

Sometimes history is in the present.

That’s how one tribal leader sees a recent meeting between representatives of four Sioux tribes recently in Rapid City. The Oglala Sioux Tribe hosted Standing Rock Sioux, Rosebud Sioux and Crow Creek Sioux representatives, an event that hasn’t happened in more than 100 years, according to Bryan

Brewer, president of the Oglala Sioux.

While that certainly appears historic, more history seems ready to be made as well. The 60 people who attended the meetings agreed they wanted to work together and wrote a set of bylaws to do so. They also plan to meet again in April and say that 22 Sioux tribes are eligible to join them.

While they’ve talked about it and dreamed about it, they see this as a chance to work together as one nation.

Working together with one voice holds the promise of more attention being paid to issues and needs of the Sioux tribes. In many ways, they share the same fight and similar problems and challenges. As a people, they understand those struggles

and might have similar ideas how to best handle them.

Even if each tribe continues to have individual issues it seeks to solve, unity might make them stronger and help smaller tribes, in particular, be heard.

We applaud the tribes and encourage the effort, one that could have great results.

– Argus Leader, Sioux Falls, March 11, 2013