

# VIEWPOINTS

## A tear in the fabric of our state

I'll admit I simply shrugged several months ago when I first read an article entitled, "Here's why remote state capitals are often more corrupt," written by Brad Plumer.

His work appeared in the May 16, 2013 online edition of the Washington Post.

Plumer noted that two recent economic working papers offered up a theory that geography may help determine the level of corruption that may exist in a state's capital city.

The first paper, written by Filipe R. Campante of Harvard Kennedy School and Quoc-Anh Do of Singapore Management University looks at state capitals in the United States and finds that "isolated capital cities are robustly associated with greater levels of corruption."

Plumer wrote that the two co-authors measure a state's shadiness by looking at the number of federal convictions for public corruption between 1976 and 2002. As it turns out, this correlates reasonably well with a state capital's geographic remoteness from major population centers.

I filed that away mentally, trying to recall how many federal corruption cases over the years have had their roots in our state's capital city. Nothing came to mind, but Plumer couldn't help himself. He interjected this statement after revealing the remoteness-corruption link: "We're looking at you,

### BETWEEN THE LINES



DAVID LIAS  
david.lias@plaintalk.net

Springfield, Illinois and Pierre, South Dakota."

How can isolated state capitals tend to have a higher likelihood of corruption? Turns out one factor can be, of all things, a profession I hold near and dear – the media.

The authors found that state capitals located in remote areas tend to receive less newspaper and media coverage. What's more, voter knowledge about the goings-on in these isolated statehouses tends to be lower. And, as a result, voter turnout for state elections tends to be depressed.

According to the history books, Pierre was chosen as South Dakota's capital because it is located just about smack dab in the geographic center of the state. Over a century ago, South Dakotans evidently figured that the entire populace should suffer, to some degree, equally. No matter what far-flung corner of the state you may call home, the chances are a trip to Pierre when the Legislature is in session will be a long one.

It seemed like such a good idea at the time. There even seemed to be bit of historical

support in placing the capital far away from the greedy special interests that may have taken root at the time in such major metropolitan areas as Sioux Falls, Rapid City and Aberdeen.

At the nation's founding, James Madison argued that capital cities should be located "in that spot which will be least removed from every part of the empire." That way, Madison asserted, government would be insulated from powerful economic interests. But perhaps Madison erred. Or maybe his prescription is just wrong for our times.

Today, our state finds itself embroiled in corruption of some sort. Things are just coming to light; the investigation is in its early stages.

All we know for certain, thanks to announcements made by Gov. Dennis Daugaard from his isolated office in Pierre, is that the official inquiries involve the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED). Other well-placed sources also have said federal authorities are investigating the finances of an idled beef plant in Aberdeen and a federal immigration program that supplied much of its funding.

Also, an individual who was highly involved in the state economic development efforts, including the financing of the beef plant and other ag ventures, was found dead of a gunshot wound near Lakes Andes three

weeks ago. Authorities have yet to publicly elaborate on the circumstances of his death.

Concerning the various findings of their study, Campante and Do write, "From a policy perspective, in particular, one is led to conclude that extra vigilance might be needed, when it comes to politics with isolated capital cities, in order to counteract their tendency towards reduced accountability."

This is about the time one would expect one to say it is time for South Dakota voters to hold their elected officials accountable, but as grand of a notion as that may be, it's much easier said than done.

Last April, the Argus Leader, in an exhaustive report, talked with many members of our current state Legislature about conflicts of interest. Many state lawmakers clearly find themselves in such conflicts constantly, yet most of them say it's not a problem. (Notice that's what they say.) That's easy for them to say; currently, there are no rules that prohibit any lawmaker from voting on legislation that pose a clear conflict of the public's interest.

One could also make the argument that the corruption our state is currently experiencing is happening outside the realm of our Legislature. We won't know this until the investigations are complete, but it appears that any alleged wrongdoing may have

occurred more at the executive level, specifically involving the GOED and officials appointed or hired by a prior governor.

Perhaps accountability needs to first be aimed at the governor's office, and officials linked to that office. We hope, if the investigation clearly finds deficiencies in that regard in our executive branch, that our governor deals with them swiftly and effectively.

All we can do right now is speculate, but this we know for certain: corruption tears at the very fabric of this state, in ways that can be unexpected. People like Campante and Do, who study this kind of thing, note that the evidence is clear – indicators of corruption are negatively correlated with important economic outcomes. Corruption reduces economic growth, via reduced private investment; corruption limits development, as measured by per capita income, child mortality, and literacy; and corruption affects the making of economic policy.

You don't need us to tell you that corruption is bad. What's not so obvious is how what's being investigated currently has likely already had a negative affect on the state economy, on our health, on the quality of our education, and our quality of life.

The damage won't quickly be undone. Hopefully, ways will be found to help make sure something like this doesn't happen again in our fair state.

## How do I loathe the game?

By Paula Damon

"If a man watches three football games in a row, he should be declared legally dead." Erma Bombeck, columnist

"Are you going to watch the game," my husband asked as he eagerly settled on the couch to watch his Cleveland Browns on TV.

"I don't think so," I replied but was thinking, Are you kidding me?

Well into the first quarter, I stole a few glances of the game, while passing through the living room, of course, and was quickly reminded of the many reasons why I do not like football.

First of all, professional football lacks precision. It is a very sloppy game among grunting, sweating oversized men in tight pants simultaneously scurrying away from each other, running toward each other, crashing into each other and toppling all over each other.

Throughout the eternally long three-hour broadcast, the same dull routine replays over and over again, from one end zone to the other, back and forth, back and forth. Ugh!

Watching two opposing teams repeatedly huddle, line up, run, scramble, pass, tackle and mostly fall down at the end of each play does absolutely nothing for me. It doesn't matter which league they're in – AFL or NFL – it's the same boring game to me.

And then there's the drone of commentators – OMG! Spewing monotonous dribble has to be a top qualification for that job. They also do a lot of predicting what coaches and players will do next, which to me is nothing more than a mind-numbing exercise in blowing hot air.

Oh, don't get me started on the pay scale for professional football players. Have you ever seen so many people do so little and get paid so much?

Well, I do suppose members of Congress have them beat in that category.

For as much brawn that exists in football, there is precious little action by bunch of overpaid brawling brutes who spend all of their time running in short spurts of energy, falling down and scrambling to their feet. Yawner!

It doesn't matter if Payton Manning or Tim Tibow are hiking the ball, if I were to actually sit down and watch a game, I would most definitely fall asleep or, worse yet, slip into a coma.

I am not interested in what positions players have. Offensive guard, tackle, center, quarterback, halfback, fullback, wide receiver or tight end – I can't keep them straight. Offensive end, tackle, linebacker, corner back or safety – I don't know who's who. Place kicker, punter, kickoff specialist, punt returner, kick returner or gunner – they're all are the same to me.

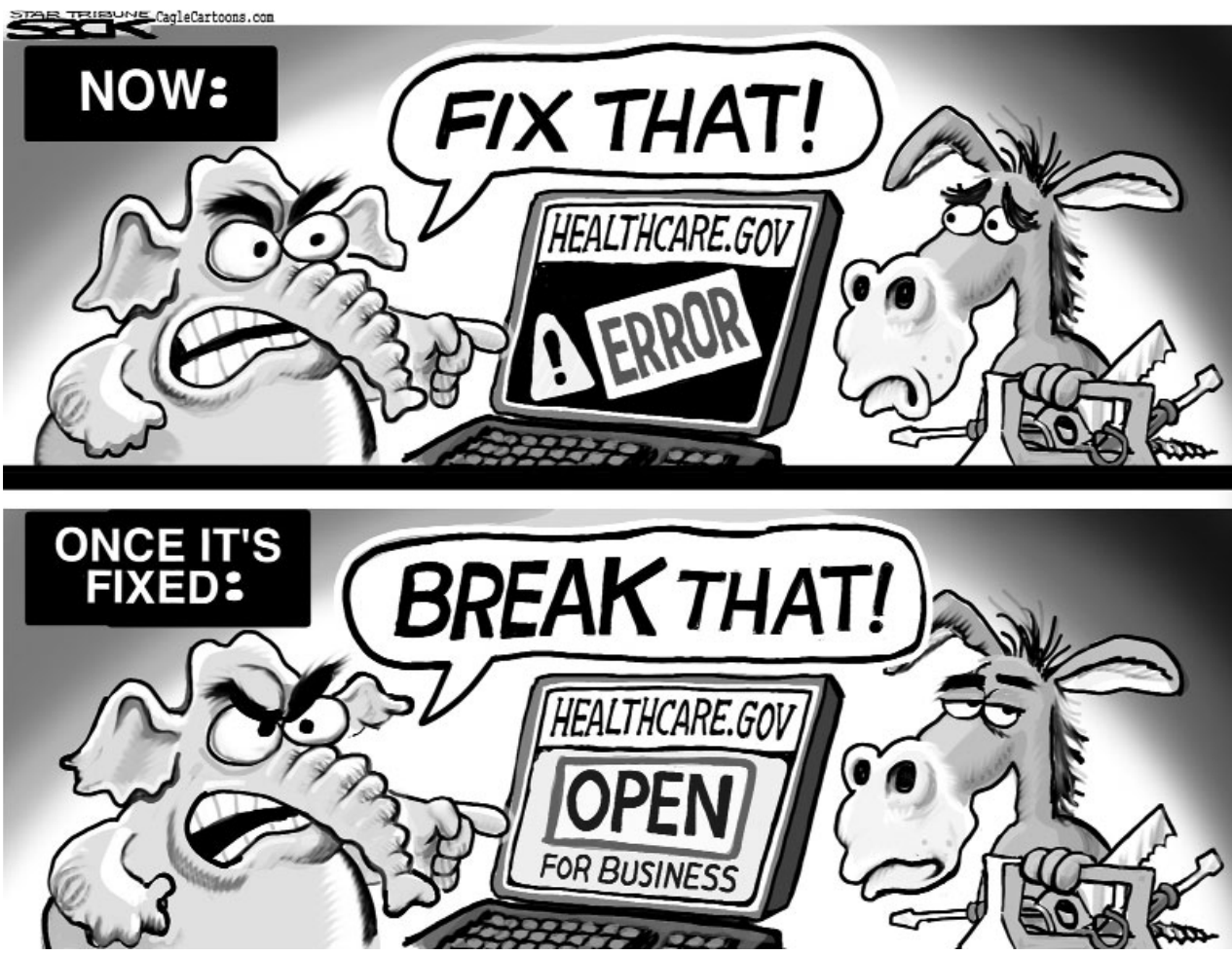
Whether the ball is in play or dead, I am so completely bored I can't stand it. Passes, runs, punts and field goal attempts don't excite me one iota.

Although, I must say that I do disagree with Phyllis Diller, who once said, "The reason why women don't play football is they would never be caught dead wearing the same outfit in public."

The real reason women don't play the sport and why a majority of us really don't care if we ever watch game is because it's a complete waste of a perfectly good Sunday afternoon.

As far as I'm concerned, professional football is 60 minutes, not counting ads and all of that commentating, divided into four 15-minute quarters of blah, blah, blah.

Well, there's one good thing. The opening game in the 2014 Major League Baseball season is only four months away. Yes!



## Take time to thank veterans

By Larry Zimmerman

Secretary, SD Department of Veterans Affairs

It's hard to believe that November is already here. The World Series is over, tailgating is coming to an end, there are long lists of honey do's to complete before the snow flies, and our taste buds are craving the taste of pumpkin.

November is also a great opportunity for us to thank our veterans who have served. Our country's military has left a legacy like no other fighting force ever assembled. The uniforms they wear, and the flag they carry, are held in esteem wherever

they have served. And that is their finest tribute: Across the world, to people who struggle and suffer, the sight of an American in uniform has meant hope, relief, and deliverance.

Look around your neighborhoods, your local coffee shops, nursing homes, colleges and unfortunately, the streets. South Dakota's 75,000 veterans who fought for our freedom are everywhere. Seek them out, thank them and ask if you can do anything for them.

Most football teams are made up of 11 players – and it is said that the action of a player who enables a teammate to score is said to be a champion – we

want our team of advocates at the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs to be the champion for our veterans. We want to assist them in receiving the benefits they have earned. We encourage them to contact their local veterans service officer and get the ball to the finish line.

While I may not be the first to thank our veterans for their service, I ask each of you to ensure that I'm not the last one who thanks them.

Thank you, veterans! Bless you all and God bless the United States of America!

### PLAIN TALK POLL RESULTS

Will you sign up for the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare)?

No 34  
I would, but I already have health insurance 18  
Yes 11

Total Votes 63

To participate in the Plain Talk's weekly poll, log on to [plaintalk.net](http://plaintalk.net).

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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.

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