

Voter pamphlet seems a bit empty

During a casual conversation with County Auditor Ruth Bremer recently, I asked her if sample ballots were available at her office.

She answered affirmatively, but also expressed a fair amount of concern. In her mind, the information being provided to voters from the state just didn't seem complete.

With my curiosity piqued, I logged on to the web page of Secretary of State Jason Gant, and it didn't take long to find out why Ruth is a bit concerned.

This November, South Dakota voters will be busy shortly after arriving at the polls. They will be asked to choose who they feel should occupy the White House for the next four years, and who should serve as our representative in Congress. There also are a bevy of candidates running for a variety of offices, from county commission to state legislator.

South Dakotans have never been hesitant to use the referral and initiative process. It's a trait that really shows this election year. November's ballot will give voters the opportunity to decide the fate of four Constitutional amendments and three referred laws.

State law requires the secretary of state to prepare and publish a pamphlet that provides information concerning constitutional amendments, initiatives and referred measures.

In nearly all cases in recent South Dakota election history, the person serving in the secretary of state office has provided information in these pamphlets that provide both a "pro" and a "con" opinion of the measure to better help inform voters of the issues involved.

Gant, it appears, was able to get pro and con statements on the three referred laws that will appear on our ballots. Information about the four Constitutional amendments, however, only contains supportive statements. Voters who pick up a pamphlet at their auditors' offices, or who call it up online, will find no "con" statements for those four ballot measures.

That is a bit of head-scratcher. One's first reaction, when perusing the pamphlet, is of being left in the dark. Are we to presume that the Constitutional amendments that appear on our ballots are so popular that no one opposes them?

Those of us with a bit of skeptical nature can't help but wonder Gant's effort to solicit citizen's input – specifically "con" statements regarding the four amendments – was sufficient.

We note that this has happened a couple times while other individuals served as secretary of state. No one

evidently could be found to write "con" statements for Constitutional Amendment H in 2008 and Constitutional Amendments B and C in 2002.

Gant told the Mitchell Daily Republic, in a prepared statement, that he sent more than 50 letters July 9 to

potential authors of pro and con statements for the pamphlet. By July 31, he was still missing statements, he said, so he posted notices on his office's website sdsos.gov via Facebook and Twitter.

I guess that means we all now have to become Facebook friends with our secretary of state. Make sure to follow him on Twitter, too. He may someday send a very important tweet your way.

After those attempts, Gant said, he did not receive any con statements for the four constitutional amendments. So, his office went ahead and printed 25,000 ballot question pamphlets and distributed them across the state on paper as well as on the sdsos.gov website in PDF, audio and digital book formats.

The 2012 pamphlet was published online Aug. 23 and distributed to county auditors beginning Aug. 30. In addition, there are braille and large-print copies available.

We think it's great that some of our tax dollars are used to widely distribute information concerning ballot questions that we'll all be asked to answer in November.

The four Constitutional amendments deal with provisions relating to corporations, lifting travel reimbursement restrictions for state legislators, factors involving the cement plant trust fund, and adding an amendment that will require a balanced state budget.

Who knows? Maybe Gant can, with a clear conscience, look us all square in the eyes and say, "Hey, I tried people. It's not my fault that no one wanted to write 'con' statements."

That's just a bit hard to swallow, though. We South Dakotans generally are a civil lot, with a variety of viewpoints. We often tend to "agree to disagree" and it seems implausible to believe there is no one living on our state's vast landscape who could conjure up a "con" statement for those four ballot measures.

The end result is a voter information pamphlet that lacks balance, and seems designed to unfairly skew one's vote in favor of the four Constitutional amendments.

State voters deserve better. We can't help but believe that Gant could have done a better job at performing this specific task that state law requires.

BETWEEN THE LINES



DAVID LIAS
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Lionism: tail twister and lion tamer aside

If I'd tell you I'm a lion, you'd say I need some time off. What if I said I had a tail twister and a lion tamer? Bonkers, you'd conclude.

It's true. I am a Lion with a capital "L" and there are 44 others in my den.

Over 46,000 Lions clubs and 1.35 million members in over 200 countries make Lions the world's largest service club organization. And, we're also one of the most effective.

Our members do whatever it takes to help our communities. Everywhere we volunteer, we make friends...with children and adults who need eyeglasses, seniors who don't have enough to eat, high school students who need scholarships for college, missionaries traveling to the poorest regions of the world, bringing sight, hearing and other services, preschoolers whose eyes we test for early childhood sight issues, young artists who endeavor to express peace through their drawings and so many others.

Our vision is to be the global leader in community and humanitarian service, and our mission is to empower volunteers to serve their communities and promote international understanding.

While I am somewhat of a new-be, going on four years, looking back on my first impression, I recall the compelling qualities that drew me into the organization.

The Lions' Code of Ethics embodies the

belief in being positive when doubts arise, building up others, avoiding unfair advantages, being sincere, remembering our obligations to our nation, state and community, to give of our time and labor, to be sympathetic when the chips are down, helping the weak and sharing our bounty.

MY STORY YOUR STORY



PAULA DAMON
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Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, dedicated to enhancing early detection and treatment of vision impairments in young Iowa children (target population 6 to 48 months of age) through screening and public education.

Lions Club volunteers throughout Iowa have been trained to organize and conduct free, non-invasive, vision-screening sessions. The results are interpreted by

trained staff in the UI Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences and returned to families.

Through Iowa Kids Sight, Lions volunteers screen youngsters for amblyopia, the most common vision problem in preschool children. Without early childhood screening, amblyopia often goes undetected, causing a decrease in vision in one or both eyes or permanent vision loss.

It's estimated that three to five percent of the U.S. population suffers from amblyopia, which means some 9,000 Iowa children under the age of four suffer from poor vision in one or both eyes.

Oh, by the way, KidSight vision screenings are free. That's how Lions likes to do things.

So, the next time you have a chance to join a Lions Club, attend and/or volunteer at a Lions event, such as Pancake Days, Oct. 5-6, Shrine Temple, 508 Nebraska Street, Sioux City, purchase Lions' mints, support Lions' scholarships or Peace Poster art competition, don't hesitate one iota. Because when you do, you'll do a whole lot of good for many.

SOURCES: www.uiowa.edu, www.lionsclub.org.

Letter to the Editor

A Safe Dakota Days

To the editor:

This week is the week of Dakota Days (D-Days). This long held traditional celebration includes the D-Days Parade, USD's Homecoming Game and a variety of celebrations throughout the community. We all look forward to this exciting time of year. At the Police Department, we are working with our Public Safety Partners to make this a safe celebration

for everyone.

Past D-Days celebrations have unfortunately included assaults, sexual assaults, alcohol related medical emergencies and other injuries. Our goal this year is to reduce and if possible eliminate these types of occurrences. Further, if one of these tragic events does occur, we will provide the fastest most effective response possible.

Some of the efforts we are undertaking include:

- Significantly increased patrols – This year there will be almost 50 percent more officers patrolling during high celebration areas in cars, on bikes, and on foot. This will include four officers from Yankton and Clay County Deputies who will be assisting VPD.
- Additional surveillance equipment will allow for better support for patrol officers.
- Special investigative teams made up of Detectives and DCI Investigators will provide quick response to major crimes and proactive enforcement regarding those furnishing alcohol to minors.
- Additional real-time communication with the public through Facebook and Twitter updates.
- The Highway Patrol will be conducting proactive DUI patrols in Vermillion and Clay County.
- Volunteer Fire and EMS

personnel will man equipment to provide quick response to medical and fire emergencies.

- Sanford Hospital and USD Volunteers will provide a safe area for intoxicated persons.

How can you be part of the solution?

- Call immediately if you see something that is unsafe or suspicious.
- Don't drink if you are under 21.
- Do not furnish alcohol to underage participants.
- Do not drink and drive.
- Be a good neighbor: be courteous to others, throw litter in garbage containers, and do not urinate in public.

Working together we can make this a safe and fun D-Days for everyone.

Matthew Betzen,
Chief of Police
Vermillion

Guest Commentary Great news for South Dakota students

BY GOV. DENNIS DAUGAARD

Sometimes South Dakota can have an inferiority complex. Because we're small or because we're rural, we sometimes think we don't stack up with other places. But being small and rural doesn't mean being second-rate. Three national news stories recently reported that South Dakota has a lot to celebrate.

The October 2012 issue of Fast Company magazine includes an article entitled "Schooling Cyberninjas." The article reports that the National Security Agency, a part of the U.S. Department of Defense, is working hard to train new computer security experts to protect our nation's online infrastructure from attacks. As the article notes, "The goal is to create a pipeline of government-vetted talent, and with it, a robust line of virtual

national defense."

NSA selected four universities to launch NSA-certified cybersecurity programs. One of those four schools is Dakota State University. Gov. Bill Janklow made Dakota State "the computer school" in the 1980s, and in the decades since, DSU has developed cutting-edge programs in information assurance, biometrics, and other information technology fields. DSU has a national reputation for excellence – and it is right here in South Dakota.

Another South Dakota university was featured by Bloomberg News on Sept. 18. The article, headlined "Harvard losing out to South Dakota in graduate pay," noted that while a Harvard graduate earns an average \$54,100 starting salary, a new graduate of the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology earns \$56,700 on

average. That's right – the School of Mines beats Harvard by \$2,600. Why is this happening? Because the School of Mines is offering high-quality programs in the engineering fields – where there are lots of jobs and strong demand for more highly skilled graduates.

In a third piece of good news, South Dakota's Lake Area Technical Institute (LATI) was named in September as one of 10 finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, which is the nation's signature recognition of high achievement and performance in America's community colleges. This is the second year in a row that LATI has been honored in this way.

Dakota State, the School of Mines, and LATI are not alone. Every one of South Dakota's universities and technical institutes offers great programs

that prepare our students to compete in high-demand fields – from accounting or medicine at USD, to engineering and pharmacy at SDSU, to banking and music education at Northern State, to science and math education at Black Hills State, to highly focused programs for careers in health care, manufacturing, electrification and other needed occupations at our other great technical institutes.

We hear a lot about the unemployment rate among young people, but that's not a big problem for graduates from any of the programs I just mentioned. It's something for high school students to think about as they plan for higher education: Try to find an education major that will get you a job at the end.

There are plenty of great options, right here in South Dakota.

SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO DAVID.LIAS@PLAINTALK.NET