

# How About A Debate Between D's And R's On Parties' Beliefs?

BY BOB MERCER  
STATE CAPITOL BUREAU

PIERRE – Ann Tornberg and Pam Roberts, the Democratic and Republican chairwomen in South Dakota, would perform a public service by holding a debate.

On stage they could highlight the major positions of their respective political parties and educate hundreds of thousands of South Dakotans.

To what end? The two major political parties have a common problem.

Large numbers of people have registered to vote as members of no party in South Dakota during the past decade. News

reporters typically refer to them as independents.

We make assumptions about why so many voters have taken this route, but we haven't surveyed them to find the reasons.

So ask yourself this question: Do you know what it means today to be a Republican or a Democrat in South Dakota?

The two political parties' activists answer that question every two years at their statewide conventions when they officially adopt platforms and resolutions.

But the only general access to those documents is through their websites at [www.sddp.org](http://www.sddp.org) and [www.southdakotagop.com](http://www.southdakotagop.com).

Meanwhile

approximately 10,000 South Dakotans reach age 18 each year and can pick a party, or not, if they register to vote.

Statewide elections have been won or lost by swings of less than 10,000 votes.

The latest reflection of this trend against registering with a political party is the effort, led by two Democrats of some renown, to erase the party system.

They are Rick Weiland, a past Democratic candidate for U.S. House and U.S. Senate, and Drey Samuelson, who was chief of staff for Democratic former U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson.

Rather than work to broaden support for the

Democratic Party, they want partisan elections to become non-partisan in South Dakota, except for president.

Republicans currently hold every statewide elected office, from lands commissioner to all three seats in Congress. They have super-majorities in both chambers of the Legislature.

There have been rare periods when Democrats held many of those offices. As recently as 2004, Democrats held all three seats in Congress.

But petition carriers are working this fall to gather sufficient signatures to put several anti-partisan measures on the statewide

election ballot in 2016.

Weiland and Samuelson offer their non-partisan election plan. South Dakota Farmers Union wants an independent commission to draw legislative districts.

These would be major turns for politics and government in South Dakota.

Yet the majority of South Dakota's registered voters are still aligned with a political party.

The latest monthly count from the state elections office on Oct. 5 showed 240,452 Republicans; 172,030 Democrats; and 109,959 in the joint category for other, non-affiliated and independent voters.

Roll back to the 2006 general election. The count that autumn was 240,101 Republicans; 190,905 Democrats; and 74,608 in the loose category we call independents.

Those numbers show the Republican brand is stuck in place, the Democratic brand has lost a significant slice of its share, and no-party has gained nearly 50 percent.

Since 2006, our family's children turned 18. Not even a postcard arrived from any political party urging them to consider registering with that party.

As for a chairwomen's debate, would anyone watch?

Something would be better than nothing.

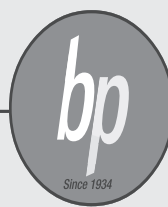
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The individual selected for this position will:

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**Applications are being accepted online through November 2, 2015 at <https://www.usajobs.gov/>.** Applications not submitted by this date through the USAJobs website will not be accepted. For more information contact **Keith Zanter, County Executive Director at 605-624-7060 Ext. #2,** or at [keith.zanter@sd.usda.gov](mailto:keith.zanter@sd.usda.gov).

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### SOUTH DAKOTA HUMAN SERVICES CENTER

## Mental Health Aides/CNA's

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