

The Press & Dakotan

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OPINION OTHER VIEWS

Must Holiday Cheer Be Politically Correct?

WATERTOWN PUBLIC OPINION (Dec. 15): Getting into the holiday season is a lot different than it used to be.

It wasn't too long ago public school Christmas programs included traditional holiday songs like "Silent Night", "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" along with "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" and "Frosty the Snowman".

Those days are long gone, however, as being politically correct has taken on more importance than it ever should. The increased concern over the separation of church and state argument also hit new heights and led to the removal of songs during school programs with any hint of a religious trace. That, of course, is more than just a bit ironic because the Christmas season and holidays — don't forget Hanukkah — have their basis in religion.

Sioux Falls got a taste of what is and isn't socially acceptable during the holidays last year when the city's annual event allowing public and private school students to decorate snowplow blades drew fire. Apparently there were no concerns about the blades decorated by public school students. Two parochial schools participating in the city's Paint the Plows program last December, however, decorated the blades with the words "Jesus Christ" and "Happy Birthday Jesus."

Pretty radical stuff, right? What did you expect from Christian schools? Even the biggest Grinch shouldn't be offended by those messages, especially since they'd likely be obscured once the plows started pushing snow.

That wasn't good enough for a local secular group, Siouxland Freethinkers. It complained about the artwork saying that it violated the constitutional separation of church and state. And, technically, they were probably right. State, local and federal governments should not be endorsing one religion over another, especially in a multi-faith country like ours.

But there still should be room for some common sense and to recognize a simple gesture of holiday spirit for what it is. How many snowplow blades have you heard of leading to new religious converts? Not many, we'll bet.

This year the city is continuing its Paint the Plows program, although with a disclaimer affixed to the snowplows. The disclaimer says the city doesn't endorse the religious messages and it appears to have satisfied all sides — to a point. Although the president of the Siouxland Freethinkers still has misgivings.

"If it was a plow mentioning Muhammad would you feel the same way?" Allen Larson said. "If it was a plow mentioning Hanukkah would you feel the same way?"

Larson said he wasn't the president of the group last year and he doesn't approve of religious symbolism. However, he said, the group decided that the debate over the plows would not be a priority this year. Now that's thinking — free or otherwise — that makes sense.

We seriously doubt whatever message is put on the blade of a snowplow is going to spark much religious fervor one way or another. Most people, we believe, likely view the decorated slow blades as an amusing way to inject a little cheer into what can be a long and dreary winter. And when you consider Congress starts its day with a prayer and many city council meetings across the country do the same thing, what's the harm with decorating a few snowplow blades with birthday greetings? It's not like they're saying praise Jesus or God is great.

Oh, and if the politically correct folks are so concerned about the separation of church and state, how come they're not demanding the phrase "In God We Trust" be removed from our money supply? Apparently, there is an exception for that when it comes to cash.

Let the holiday season be what it's supposed to be: A time of peace on Earth and goodwill toward men. We could use a lot more of that, regardless of religious beliefs or lack thereof.

ABOUT THIS PAGE

The View page provides a forum for open discussion of issues and interests affecting our readers. Initialed editorials represent the opinion of the writer, but not necessarily that of the **PRESS & DAKOTAN**. Bylined columns represent the view of the author. We welcome letters on current topics. Questions regarding the Views page should be directed to Kelly Hertz at kelly.hertz@yankton.net.

IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
Today is Monday, Dec. 21, the 355th day of 2015. There are 10 days left in the year. Winter arrives at 11:48 p.m. Eastern time.

Today's Highlight in History: On Dec. 21, 1945, U.S. Army Gen. George S. Patton, 60, died in Heidelberg, Germany, 12 days after being seriously injured in a car accident.

On this date: In 1620, Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower went ashore for the first time at present-day Plymouth, Massachusetts.

In 1864, during the Civil War, Union forces led by Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman concluded their "March to the Sea" as they captured Savannah, Georgia.

In 1879, the Henrik Ibsen play "A Doll's House" premiered at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen.

In 1914, the first feature-length silent film comedy, Mack Sennett's "Tillie's Punctured Romance," starring Marie Dressler, Mabel Normand and Charlie Chaplin, premiered. The U.S. government began requiring passport applicants to provide photographs of themselves.

In 1937, Walt Disney's first animated feature, "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," had its world premiere in Los Angeles.

In 1940, author F. Scott Fitzgerald died in Hollywood, California, at age 44.

In 1958, Charles de Gaulle was elected to a seven-year term as the first president of the Fifth Republic of France.

In 1968, Apollo 8 was launched on a mission to orbit the moon.

In 1971, the U.N. Security Council chose Kurt Waldheim to succeed U Thant as Secretary-General.

In 1976, the Liberian-registered tanker Argo Merchant broke apart near Nantucket Island, off Massachusetts, almost a week after running aground, spilling 7.5 million gallons of oil into the North Atlantic.

In 1988, 270 people were killed when a terrorist bomb exploded aboard a Pam Am Boeing 747 over Lockerbie, Scotland, sending wreckage crashing to the ground.

In 1995, the city of Bethlehem passed from Israeli to Palestinian control.

Ten years ago: The Senate rejected opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. The Senate approved a six-month extension of the USA Patriot Act to keep the anti-terrorism law from expiring on Dec. 31, 2005.

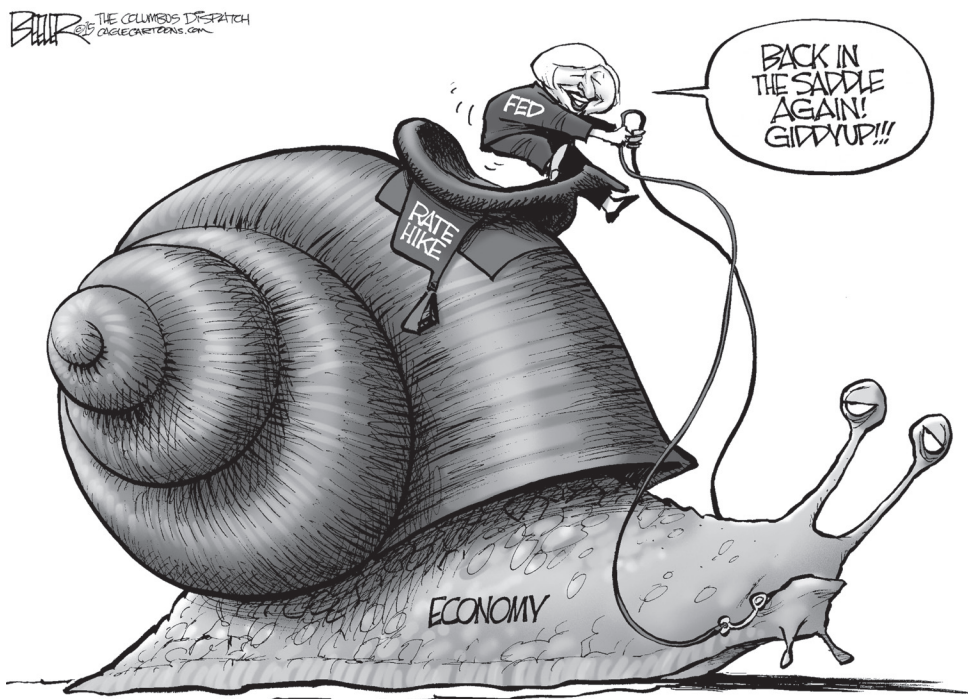
One year ago: Jordan Axani, a 28-year-old businessman from Toronto, and a woman he'd never met before, Elizabeth Quinn Gallagher, a 23-year-old student from Nova Scotia, set out on a round-the-world trip. (Axani had advertised on social media for a travel companion after breaking up with his girlfriend, also named Elizabeth Gallagher; the companion was required to be a Canadian named Elizabeth Gallagher to take advantage of the non-refundable, non-exchangeable airline tickets.) Actress Billie Whitelaw, 82, died in London.

Today's Birthdays: Country singer Freddie Hart is 89. Talk show host Phil Donahue is 80. Movie director John Avildsen is 80. Actress Jane Fonda is 78. Actor Larry Bryggman is 77. Singer Carla Thomas is 73. Musician Albert Lee is 72. Conductor Michael Tilson Thomas is 71. Actor Josh Mostel is 69. Actor Samuel L. Jackson is 67. Movie producer Jeffrey Katzenberg is 65. Singer Betty Wright is 62. International Tennis Hall-of-Famer Chris Evert is 61. Actress Jane Kaczmarek is 60. Country singer Lee Roy Parnell is 59. Entertainer Jim Rose is 59. Former child actress Lisa Gerritsen is 58. Actor-comedian Ray Romano is 58. Country singer Christy Forester (The Forester Sisters) is 53. Rock musician Murph (The Lemonheads; Dinosaur Jr.) is 51. Actor-comedian Andy Dick is 50. Rock musician Gabrielle Glaser is 50. Actress Michelle Hurd is 49. Actor Kiefer Sutherland is 49. Actress Karri Turner is 49. Actress Khrystyne Haje is 47. Country singer Brad Warren (The Warren Brothers) is 47. Actress Julie Delpy is 46. Country singer-musician Rheaun Boyer (Carolina Rain) is 45. Contemporary Christian singer Natalie Grant is 44. Actor Glenn Fitzgerald is 44. Singer-musician Brett Scallions is 44. World Golf Hall of Famer Karri Webb is 41. Rock singer Lukas Rossi (Rock Star Supernova) is 39. Actress Rutina Wesley (TV: "True Blood") is 37. Rock musician Anna Bulbrook (Airborne Toxic Event) is 33. Country singer Luke Stricklin is 33. Actor Steven Yeun is 32. Actress Kaitlyn Dever is 19.

Thought for Today: "It is not necessary to understand things in order to argue about them." — Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, French author and dramatist (1732-1799).

FROM THE BIBLE

You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. Luke 1:31. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.



Pierre Report | Jean Hunhoff

Education Funding And Rules Changes

BY REP. JEAN HUNHOFF

R-District 18 (Yankton)



J. Hunhoff

Due to the Interim Rules Committee meeting and an Appropriations Committee work session, I was in Pierre for a few days and was unable to attend the YSD School Board meeting. The comments made by my colleagues at the board meeting are reflective of my thoughts, also. Education and Medicaid spending will occupy the majority of the budget discussion in 2016.

What is hoped is that we will make strides in those areas. The Appropriations Committee will be embarking on a new process this legislative session that will focus on the Legislature developing its own budget utilizing the governor's budget as a starting point. This process for budget hearings, functions of the joint Appropriations Committee and involvement of the legislators will allow for more involvement in the development and approval of the budget. Change in process will bring new opportunities and challenges for the committee.

The Interim Rules Committee had a full agenda as this is the last meeting until March. By statute the Committee does not meet during the legislative session.

Game, Fish and Parks presented rules for increase in fees on entrance fees in Custer State Park, reservation fees increase for residents and nonresidents for using the telephone call center, fee increases for boat licensing and season setting and license numbers for Spring Turkey season and some waterfowl seasons.

Bon Homme County will see an increase of 50 male turkey licenses to equal 300 licenses.

The department is attempting to incentivize campers to utilize the online system rather than the call system. The cost is significantly less for the state for the online system. I was concerned that again the S.D. residents are being charged for a service when they are in the state 365 days and contribute to the park system in many other aspects. Sen. Heinemann asked the Department to assure that the online system is easily accessible and working.

I questioned the use of the increased revenue for the boat licenses. I was told that goes directly back to park improvements for roads and boat access areas. The proposed fee increases for the park passes, campsite reservations and boat licenses are projected to be \$414,221 for FY 16 and \$1,083,489 for FY17. The process was complete and the committee approved.

Departments of state government are required to post public hearings in three newspapers. The choice is by the department. I noted to the department that, for these particular rules, Yankton was not one of the newspapers that had a notice of hearing. That was interesting in that Lewis and Clark Recreational Area is the second largest park in the state and has utilization of both campsites and boating.

GF&P also brought a rule that would allow them to authorize the sale of license lists to repeat applicants under certain circumstances without the necessity of seeking prior approval of the GF&P Commission. This led to a discussion about the sale of the lists and what goes to the requesters. The answer was the name and address of the licensee for the license type being requested. All requests need to go through the commission. Those requesters using lists for marketing purposes are charged a fee. A licensee holder when purchasing a license can request not to have his/her name on the list.

The Bureau of Human Resources brought rules to bring the department in line with the requirements of the Affordable Care Act. Rules needed to be changed that would allow for an appeal process for an adverse determination or claim denial, eliminate preexisting conditions from eligibility in the state employee health benefit plan; and provide an application deadline for employees who were not previously eligible to apply for state employee health benefits and life benefit without showing proof of insurability. The committee approved the process.

The Department of Labor amended rules to allow domestic employers the option of paying state unemployment contributions annually instead of paying quarterly. Contributions of a domestic employer, who elects and qualifies to report wages and contribution annually are due Jan. 31 following the years for which the contributions are payable.

The Department of Labor and Regulation: South Dakota Athletic Commission brought forth rules changes for both mixed martial arts competition and boxing. Requirements for equipment for management of injuries were included; fees were increased for promoters; existing rules regarding accepted medical documentation for contestants were clarified; time frame changes for reporting data required from events were clarified; referee requirements were set; an increase time period was allowed for weigh-in prior to an event; and responsibilities of the commission's designees were clarified. S.D. Licensed nurse practitioners and physician assistants are able to perform the required physicals the fighters to have completed 12 months prior to the bout. The process was approved by the committee.

The Department of Health brought rules to expand the Rural Facility Assistance Program to

add health care social workers and speech therapists to the list of eligible health professionals to access this program. This is a cost-sharing program between a rural hospital and the state to guarantee up to \$10,000 to a new graduate that works at an applicant facility for three years. The amount of payback is dependent upon the size of the community. The is an attempt to recruit health care professionals to rural communities. The process was approved.

The Board of Medical and Osteopathic Examiners amended rules to provide criteria for training a first responder (law enforcement, firefighter) in the use of opioid antagonists, provide the requirements for the physicians who issue standing orders authorizing first responders to possess antagonists, and provide the requirements for protocols and procedures related to opioid antagonists. The opioid antagonist reverses the effect of the opioid. The opioid causes respiratory depression, which basically causes the person to stop breathing. The antagonist reverses that action so that breathing does not stop. I voted for the bill but felt the rules were weak in that there were no competency requirements for successfully completing the training. The response was that it would be up to the physician to certify that the person was competent. With the continued rise in opioid use and loss of life associated with it, I concluded that this was necessary and hoped that the board would monitor if there were any negative outcomes associated with competency. The process was approved.

The Board of Examiners for Counselors and Marriage and Family Therapists amended rules to repeal unnecessary rules, implement a fee to process license verifications and duplicate renewal cards, increase license and renewal license fees for marriage and family therapists, align language to be consistent with statutory language, clarify supervisor and exam requirements and update the Code of Ethics to the most recent version. The process was approved.

The S.D. Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Training Commission amended rules to prohibit temporary or probationary non-certified law enforcement officers from working in any enforcement capacities until they successfully complete the state firearms course and receive instruction from their agency on their agency's use of force or response to resistance policy. It also called to add an additional specific area of training that law enforcement officers must complete as part of their continuing education requirements and allow physician's assistants and nurse practitioners to conduct examinations of 911 telecommunicator applicants. The process was approved.

Department of Environment and Natural Resources: The Drinking Water Program amended the Fluoridation of Water Supplies rules to reduce the required fluoride level and cleanup outdated language; and amend Bottled Water Quality rules to adopt pertinent to US FDA rules for bottled water quality. The fluoride content remains within the safety standards. There was no opposition at the hearing but at the public hearing the opposition was from two individuals that did not support fluoridation at all. The Department amended the Surface Water Quality rules by deleting the fecal coliform criteria from immersion recreation and limited contact recreation waters. (This change will leave intact the USEPA recommended Escherichia coli criteria and add the USEPA's nonylphenol aquatic life criteria.) I questioned whether this change would alter what had been the standard and was told this is more reflective of problems with fecal matter in water. The process was approved.

The final rule change from the department brought the most discussion. It had to do with rule proposed by the Water Management Board to allow fences to be constructed without a gate across the Firesteel Creek in Davison County. The issue is a concern by a landowner that had a fence with a gate on the creek to prevent his livestock from being let out by users of the creek and not shutting the gate. It really is a local issue for those that use the creek for recreation and the landowner having to maintain the gate and expecting users to close the gate. Initially a petition came before the water board requesting this change with 65 signatures on it. The public had more than 25 individuals that wanted the gates to stay in place. Because it was a rule change by the board, it came to our committee.

Committee discussion focused on the process that the Water Board was used to assess the pros and cons of the rule change. The Interim Rules Committee sent the rule back with a requirement for another public hearing to vet out the concerns. There were no opponents or proponents other than the department that supported the rule change at the Rules meeting. The committee perceives that more work needed to be done. Therefore this process of rulemaking was not approved.

I encourage residents to contact me with concerns/questions for the upcoming session. I can be reached at djhunhoff@iw.net or 660-5619. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all. Representative Jean Hunhoff