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OPINION

A Distrust That Is Well Earned

When it comes to the state of education in South Dakota, nobody really trusts the State of South Dakota. This message came from District 18 legislators this past weekend when they spoke at a local forum. They cited a clear distrust that exists between the schools and the powers in Pierre.

This distrust is richly earned.

It's small wonder, then, that legislation introduced in Pierre this winter that would make adjustments to state funding (particularly in regards to the allocation of fines and other charges that currently bolster school coffers) has been looked upon warily by the school districts, which have been burned — and squeezed and dismissed — before:

- At one time, the school districts were holding their own financially, even in the face of declining enrollments. But a property tax freeze and a subsequent mandate for schools to spend down their reserves (which, to be fair, some schools had overly stocked) put the districts in the position of going to the voters to opt out of the freeze. Nearly half of the districts in the state have had to go through this process; as Yankton residents can tell you, these opt-out efforts haven't always been successful.
- When the Great Recession hit in 2008, money was tight everywhere. Despite state law that declares that school funding must increase annually by 3 percent or the cost of living, whichever is lower, Pierre froze spending on public education one year, then cut it by more than 8 percent the next year. Since then, education spending has returned to the levels mandated by law, but the years of lost money still have not been addressed — in effect, establishing a new, lower economic bar — and are still being felt.
- In 2010, South Dakota applied for and received \$26.3 million in one-time stimulus money from the federal government that was intended specifically to hire new teachers or help retain those that were laid off. What did South Dakota do with that funding? According to a CNN report, then-Gov. Mike Rounds "intends to reduce state (school) aid by the \$26.3 million that districts will receive from the federal government and spend it on other state needs." In effect, the state pocketed the money, because, according to CNN, citing a Rounds spokesman, the governor didn't want the schools to grow reliant on one-time money. (Apparently, the state utilizing this one-time revenue influx for other uses was a more acceptable danger.)
- Last month, a bill was brought before the state Senate to endorse the idea that South Dakota is suffering from a teacher shortage, due in large part to the fact that the state's teacher pay is dead last in the country. In the Senate, this declaration — nonbinding but an integral gesture to at least acknowledge the problem — was unopposed during debate, then the measure silently failed. To some people, the episode — screamed volumes about the regard education seems to hold in some corners of the capitol.

There is no trust in state government among school officials because recent history and human nature suggest there is no good reason to trust it.

"It's alarming to me that, in a small state like South Dakota, the trust level isn't there," Rep. Bernie Hunhoff said Saturday. "They don't trust us to do what we say we are going to do."

Frankly, it's possible that lawmakers believe they can play these games with education money because a majority of South Dakotans now do not have children in school and thus do not have an emotional investment in education. This situation can, conceivably, present opportunities to conduct such maneuvers without fear of serious backlash or political consequence.

So, if that speculation is true, we all share the blame.

Nevertheless, the distrust that is now evident in the educational arena should be alarming to everyone — from school officials and educators to parents with kids in school and to anyone who cares about the future of this state. And most of all, it should be worrisome to our lawmakers.

Currently, there is little evidence that such cancerous distrust will be replaced with something more constructive this session. The writing again seems to be on the capitol wall.

And that is a sad indictment of the state's mentality toward education.

kmh

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, Feb. 26, the 57th day of 2014. There are 308 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Feb. 26, 1904, the United States and Panama proclaimed a treaty under which the U.S. agreed to undertake efforts to build a ship canal across the Panama isthmus.

On this date: In 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte escaped from exile on the island of Elba.

In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson signed a congressional act establishing Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona.

In 1929, President Calvin Coolidge signed a measure establishing Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming.

In 1945, authorities ordered a midnight curfew at night clubs, bars and other places of entertainment across the nation.

In 1952, Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced that Britain had developed its own atomic bomb.

In 1962, after becoming the first American to orbit the Earth, astronaut John Glenn told a joint meeting of Congress, "Exploration and the pursuit of knowledge have always paid dividends in the long run."

In 1970, National Public Radio was incorporated.

In 1984, the last U.S. Marines deployed to Beirut as part of an international peacekeeping force withdrew from the Lebanese capital.

In 1987, the Tower Commission, which had probed the Iran-Contra affair, issued its report, which rebuked President Ronald Reagan for failing to control his national security staff.

In 1993, a truck bomb built by terrorists exploded in the parking garage of New York's World Trade Center, killing six people and injuring more than 1,000 others.

In 1994, a jury in San Antonio acquitted eleven followers of David Koresh of murder, rejecting claims they'd ambushed federal agents; five were convicted of voluntary manslaughter.

In 2012, in a case that drew national attention, Trayon Martin, 17, was shot to death in Sanford, Fla., during an altercation with neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman, who said he'd acted in self-defense. (Zimmerman was subsequently acquitted of second-degree murder.)

Ten years ago: Two church-sanctioned studies documenting sex abuse by U.S. Roman Catholic clergy said that about four percent of clerics had been accused of molesting minors since 1950 and blamed bishops' "moral laxity" in disciplining offenders for letting the problem worsen. Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski was killed in a plane crash in southern Bosnia.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama laid out his first budget plan, predicting a federal deficit of \$1.75 trillion. General Motors Corp. posted a \$9.6 billion loss for the fourth quarter of 2008. The Pentagon, reversing an 18-year-old policy, said it would allow some media coverage of returning war dead, with family approval. Former Chicago Bulls player Norm Van Lier died at age 61.

One year ago: A deeply divided Senate voted, 58-41, to confirm Republican Chuck Hagel to be U.S. defense secretary. A hot air balloon burst into flames during a sunrise flight over the ancient Egyptian city of Luxor and then plummeted 1,000 feet to earth, killing 19 tourists (one tourist and the balloon's pilot survived).

Today's Birthdays: Singer Fats Domino is 86. Country-rock musician Paul Cotton (Poco) is 71. Actor-director Bill Duke is 71. Singer Mitch Ryder is 69. Rock musician Jonathan Cain (Journey) is 64. Singer Michael Bolton is 61. The prime minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is 60. Actor Greg Germann is 56. Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., is 56. Bandleader John McDaniel is 53. Actress Jennifer Grant is 48. Rock musician Tim Commerford (Audioslave) is 46. Singer Erykah Badu is 43. Rhythm-and-blues singer Rico Wade (Society of Soul) is 42. Olympic gold medal swimmer Jenny Thompson is 41. Rhythm-and-blues singer Kyle Norman (Jagged Edge) is 39. Actor Greg Kikaart is 37. Rock musician Chris Culos (O.A.R.) is 35. Rhythm-and-blues singer Corinne Bailey Rae is 35. Country singer Rodney Hayden is 34. Pop singer Nate Ruess (roos) (fun.) is 32. Tennis player Li Na is 32. Actor Alex Heartman (TV: "Power Rangers Samurai") is 24. Actress Taylor Dooley is 21.

Thought for Today: "One resists the invasion of armies; one does not resist the invasion of ideas." — Victor Hugo (1802-1885).

FROM THE BIBLE

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7 NIV. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis



caglecartoons.com

The Rez Of The Story

Cedar's Significance

BY VINCE TWO EAGLES

Hau Mitakuepi (Greetings My Relatives), Marita Placek e-mails asking about cedar as Native peoples use it. Here is what I have been able to gather for you and those folks who read this column concerning your question. Thank you, Marita, for your question. I hope this answer is what you're looking for.

"The Cherokee people have a story about the cedar that I found interesting, I hope you do, too. You can Google up 'Cedar as use by Native Americans' to find out much more about cedars and how and what it is used for.

"A long time ago when the Cherokee people were new upon the earth, they thought that life would be much better if there was never any night. They beseeched the Ouga (Creator) that it might be day all the time and that there would be no darkness.

"The Creator heard their voices and made the night cease and it was day all the time. Soon the forest was thick with heavy growth. It became difficult to walk and to find the path. The people toiled in the gardens many long hours trying to keep the weeds pulled from among the corn and other food plants. It got very hot, and continued that way day after long day. The people began to find it difficult to sleep, and they became short-tempered and argued among themselves.

"Not many days had passed before the people realized they had made a mistake and, once again they beseeched the Creator.

"Please," they said, "we have made a mistake ... now we think it should be night all the time."

"The Creator paused at this new request and thought that perhaps the people may be right even though all things were created in twos ... representing to us day and night, life and death, good and evil, times of plenty and those times of famine. The Creator loved the people and decided to make it night all the time as they had asked.

"The day ceased and night fell upon the earth. Soon crops stopped growing and it became very cold. The people spent much of their time gathering wood for the fires. They could not see to hunt meat, and with no crops growing, it was not long before the people were cold, weak and very hungry. Many of the people died.

"Those that remained still living gathered



Vince TWO EAGLES

once again to beseech the Creator.

"Help us Creator," they cried! "We have made a terrible mistake. You have made the day and the night perfect, and as it should be, from the beginning. We ask that you forgive us and make the day and night as it was before."

"Once again, the Creator listened to the request of the people. The day and the night became, as the people has asked, as it had been in the beginning. Each day was divided between light and darkness. The weather became more pleasant, and the crops began to grow again. Game was plentiful and hunting was good. The people had plenty to eat and there was not much sickness. The people treated each other with compassion and respect. It was good to be alive.

"The people thanked the Creator for their life and for the food they had to eat. The Creator accepted the gratitude of the people and was glad to see them smiling again.

"However, during the time of long days and night, many people had died, and the Creator was sorry that they had perished because of the night. The Creator placed their spirits in a newly created tree. This tree was named ... cedar tree.

"When you smell the aroma of the cedar tree or gaze upon it standing in the forest, remember ... you are looking upon your ancestor.

"Tradition holds that the wood of the cedar tree holds powerful protective spirits for the Cherokee. Many carry a small piece of cedar wood in their medicine bags worn around the neck. ... Always accept the blessings and gifts given and always give thanks for them."

Dakota people use the cedar leaves for ceremonial purposes like smudging prayer objects or is used in sweats as a smudge. Cedar is considered very sacred and flat cedar is highly prized.

Other indigenous people use cedar for building long houses and for other building materials particularly in the northwest region of America.

Cedar flutes are the most sought after among Indian people because of its nice, mellow tone.

If there are other uses you know about, let me know and I will pass them on to other folks.

And now you know the rez of the story. Doksha ...

YOUR LETTERS

RTEC's Value

Tom Bohnet, Yankton President, Applied Engineering

RTEC has developed into a real asset for Yankton and the surrounding communities; it's had significant impact on the success of the community, but even more important, it's had a profound impact on the students who've attended classes, manufacturing academies or special training events.

But I'd like to have you consider what it could mean to you as a parent, grandparent or business owner.

There have been many times during discussions with a parent or grandparent where they expressed a desire for their children/grandchildren to stay in or return to the community. RTEC can help make this desire become a reality as it offers classes that help prepare for the transition from a student to an employee; or improve an individual's skill sets needed by the local employers.

Supporting RTEC gives our community this opportunity.

To the businesses that have and are using RTEC, you know RTEC's value; I know that here at Applied Engineering, the RTEC training has been very beneficial and personally and financially rewarding for the employee. We have used RTEC as a recruitment tool to encourage new employees to consider moving to the Yankton area.

For those business owners that aren't using or supporting RTEC, I ask you to look to the future, as the demand for more employees with higher skill sets are needed in your businesses, where will you go to attract new employees or grow your existing workforce with opportunities for advanced training? RTEC can be the conduit for students to transfer into the local workforce with skills that are tailored toward

your needs. RTEC will be the conduit for increased technical education training dollars expected from federal and state programs as the workforce development needs only increase.

RTEC has become an integral part of Yankton's ability to grow through meeting the needs of the community, its people, as well as the employers. With community-wide support, RTEC can continue to meet the needs as well as offer even more solutions to pending and future needs of the community and businesses.

Sertoma Success

Todd Larson, Yankton President, Yankton Sertoma Club

The Yankton Sertoma Club would like to say "Thank You" to the large number of community members who attended our Feb. 7 "Men's Night-Out Stag Event." This is the largest of the club's fund-raising efforts that happen each year.

Besides this event being a great time for community members to socialize with friends, eat, drink and play card games, all the proceeds are given back to local organizations as they make funding requests to the Sertoma Club each year. Approximately \$14,000 in funding requests are made yearly and through the years, the Yankton Sertoma Club has given back more than \$500,000 to the Yankton community.

Without the community's support of this event and generous people purchasing tickets (even if they could not attend), these contributions to make Yankton a better place to live, work and play would not be possible. The Sertoma Club appreciates your generosity and again says a big "Thank You" to those who purchased tickets.

PRESS & DAKOTAN LETTER POLICY

The PRESS & DAKOTAN encourages its readers to write letters to the editor and 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 PRESS & DAKOTAN 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, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078, drop off at 319 Walnut in Yankton, fax to 665-1721 or email us at views@yankton.net.