

## THE PRESS &amp; DAKOTAN

THE DAKOTAS' OLDEST NEWSPAPER | FOUNDED 1861

Yankton Media, Inc., 319 Walnut St., Yankton, SD 57078

## CONTACT US

PHONE:  
(605) 665-7811  
(800) 743-2968  
NEWS FAX:  
(605) 665-1721  
ADVERTISING FAX:  
(605) 665-0288  
WEBSITE:  
www.yankton.net  
EMAIL ADDRESS:  
news@yankton.net

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## OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

## Transparency And The Beef Plant Debacle

**ARGUS LEADER, Sioux Falls (Jan. 18):** Gov. Dennis Daugaard said last week that he is not withholding information in the ongoing probe into financial irregularities surrounding the bankrupt Northern Beef Packers plant in Aberdeen.

We take him at his word on that. Daugaard has been forthcoming in his approach to the situation involving the Governor's Office of Economic Development, a federal investment program and former state government staff members.

He said he has ordered three external reviews related to the beef plant project, and he promised to make those audits public. But the fact that our governor feels he has to make such assertions in the first place stems in part from our state's secretive government climate. Secrecy breeds suspicion.

And as taxpayers wade through the complicated scenarios in this case, it's easy to be suspicious.

Clearly some things went wrong in the push for investments in the Aberdeen beef plant. The former head of the economic development office died by suicide, and the trail of government and private investor money flowing into the project still is unraveling.

But as we await some resolution in state and federal inquiries on the case, it is intriguing to ask an underlying question — how could the questionable activities have been prevented? Would greater public access to government correspondence and documents have made a difference?

Knowledge that government correspondence and records were open to public scrutiny may have dissuaded any potential criminal activity from occurring. And journalists, with access to such information, could have kept closer tabs on the beef plant investment activities.

Would it have mattered? No one really knows. But the tangled web of financial investments and the relationships among public and private entities that now is unfolding seems to cry out for greater public scrutiny.

South Dakota lawmakers have resisted efforts to provide public access that would put us on the same level as other states. Just last year, remember, a package of recommended changes to the state's public records and meetings laws — moves supported by the governor and attorney general — was defeated in the state Legislature. Most of the bills never made it out of committee. Some never received a yes vote.

Journalists push for greater access to public officials' correspondence and records not because they're hoping to find incriminating emails or conversations to dissect. The goal is to serve as a check on government and on public office holders; to analyze records on government spending and to determine the priorities of elected officials. All of those things should be of great interest to taxpayers as well.

No one knows whether greater government transparency would have made any difference in what transpired preceding the opening of the Northern Beef Packers plant. But what if it had?

## ON THIS DATE

## By The Associated Press

Today is Monday, Jan. 27, the 27th day of 2014. There are 338 days left in the year.

**Today's Highlight in History:** On Jan. 27, 1944, during World War II, the Soviet Union announced the complete end of the deadly German siege of Leningrad, which had lasted for more than two years.

**On this date:** In 1756, composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria.

In 1880, Thomas Edison received a patent for his electric incandescent lamp.

In 1888, the National Geographic Society was incorporated in Washington, D.C.

In 1901, opera composer Giuseppe Verdi died in Milan, Italy, at age 87.

In 1913, the musical play "The Isle O' Dreams" opened in New York; it featured the song "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" by Ernest R. Ball, Chauncey Olcott and George Graff Jr. In 1943, some 50 bombers struck Wilhelmshaven in the first all-American air raid against Germany during World War II.

In 1945, Soviet troops liberated the Nazi concentration camps Auschwitz and Birkenau in Poland.

In 1951, an era of atomic testing in the Nevada desert began as an Air Force plane dropped a one-kiloton bomb on Frenchman Flat.

In 1964, E.I. Du Pont de Nemours and Co. introduced its artificial leather substitute, Corfam. (The product ultimately failed in large part because of consumer complaints that shoes made of Corfam could not be "broken in" like leather shoes.)

In 1967, astronauts Virgil I. "Gus" Grissom, Edward H. White and Roger B. Chaffee died in a flash fire during a test aboard their Apollo spacecraft. More than 60 nations signed a treaty banning the orbiting of nuclear weapons.

In 1973, the Vietnam peace accords were signed in Paris.

In 1984, singer Michael Jackson suffered serious burns to his scalp when pyrotechnics set his hair on fire during the filming of a Pepsi-Cola TV commercial at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles.

**Ten years ago:** John Kerry won the New Hampshire Democratic presidential primary. A jury in New York heard opening arguments in the trial of Lytha Stewart, who was accused of lying about a stock sale (she was convicted in March 2004 and sentenced to five months in prison). For-

mer "Tonight Show" host Jack Paar died in Greenwich, Conn., at age 85.

**Five years ago:** Saying, "The American people expect action," President Barack Obama held closed-door meetings with House and Senate Republicans on the eve of a key vote on an economic stimulus package. Ervin Lupoe of Wilmington, Calif., fatally shot himself a day after killing his wife Ana, their 8-year-old daughter and two sets of twins, 2-year-old boys and 5-year-old girls, after faxing a note to a TV station saying the couple had just been fired from their hospital jobs. Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist John Updike died in Danvers, Mass. at age 76.

**One year ago:** Flames raced through a crowded nightclub in southern Brazil, killing 242 people. The NFC blew past the AFC 62-35 in the Pro Bowl. Novak Djokovic beat Andy Murray 6-7 (2), 7-6 (3), 6-3, 6-2 to become the first man in the Open era to win three consecutive Australian Open titles. Little-known Max Aaron won his first title at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Omaha, Neb. The CIA thriller "Argo" won top honor for overall cast performance at the Screen Actors Guild Awards; Jennifer Lawrence won leading actress for "Silver Linings Playbook" while Daniel Day-Lewis won leading actor for "Lincoln."

**Today's Birthdays:** Actor James Cromwell is 74. Actor John Witherspoon is 72. Rock musician Nick Mason (Pink Floyd) is 69. Rhythm-and-blues singer Nedra Talley (The Ronettes) is 68. Ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov is 66. Political commentator Ed Schultz is 60. Chief U.S. Justice John Roberts is 59. Country singer Cheryl White is 59. Country singer-musician Richard Young (The Kentucky Headhunters) is 59. Actress Mimi Rogers is 58. Rock musician Janick Gers (Iron Maiden) is 57. Political commentator Keith Olbermann is 55. Rock singer Margo Timmins (Cowboy Junkies) is 53. Rock musician Gillian Gilbert is 53. Actress Bridget Fonda is 50. Actor Alan Cumming is 49. Country singer Tracy Lawrence is 46. Rock singer Mike Patton is 46. Rapper Tricky is 46. Rock musician Michael Kulas (James) is 45. Actor-comedian Patton Oswalt is 45. Actor Josh Randall is 42. Country singer Kevin Denney is 38. Tennis player Marat Safin is 34.

**Thought for Today:** "Who never doubts, never half believes. Where doubt is, there truth is — it is her shadow." — Gamaliel Bailey, American abolitionist (1807-1859).

## FROM THE BIBLE

*In the beginning God. Genesis 1:1. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis*

## YOUR LETTERS

## Clueless Columnists

## David Jensen, Yankton

Can far-right columnists voice their views without their rhetoric being mean-spirited, insulting and condescending? Judging by columns in recent issues of the *Press & Dakotan*, it would appear they cannot.

Michael Reagan's recent commentary (*Press & Dakotan*, Jan. 17) referred to President Obama as "clueless." Reagan never fails to deride the president's experience as a "community organizer." Never mind the fact that Reagan's main achievements were to drop out of college, race boats and, mostly, capitalize on his famous father's name.

Then there is Michelle Malkin who, in her Jan. 20 column, claimed Secretary of State John Kerry is "stupid" because he cited poverty as a principal contributor to terrorism in the Middle East. She lists about a dozen jihadists who happen to have college educations and privileged backgrounds. She conveniently overlooks the thousands of men (and women), many who are children and a vast majority of whom live in poverty with little prospect. These are the people al-Qaida and the Taliban radicalize and recruit to spread violence in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

I don't take issue with the two columnists' stands on policies and events; rather, it is the personal, sarcastic tone Malkin and Reagan use to state their views. It



## Capitol Notebook

## Another Beat-Down For Teacher Morale From Pierre

BY BOB MERCER

State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — Talk about a fascinating political statement.

State senators voted 19-16 the other day to reject a resolution recognizing South Dakota has teacher shortages.

None of the opponents said why. When you have the votes, you don't need to explain.

Earlier in the House of Representatives, 18 had voted no.

Altogether one-third of the Legislature — 37 of 105 — refused to support recognizing the problems expressed in the resolution.

Thirty-six were Republicans. Their political party controls the Legislature.

On the Capitol's second floor is Republican Gov. Dennis Daugaard. Three years ago, facing a budget crisis, he called for 10 percent cuts including for K-12 schools.

Times are better, but that school money hasn't been replaced.

The governor's recommendation for the coming budget still leaves the schools short.

That, too, is fascinating.

Republicans run state government head to heel. The majority of voters, whether statewide or in legislative districts, gave them the responsibility.

Because they're elected, we assume they're delivering what the majority of South Dakota voters want for public schools.

That means the lowest salaries in the nation for teachers.

Low pay often means low expectations. Low expectations often mean low results.

People typically look for the best deal and for what they think they want to afford.

Voters in every school district could raise their local property taxes for schools, if they wanted. But they often don't. When they occasionally

do, they typically charge themselves just enough extra so their schools can get by financially and stay open.

There is no groundswell for raising teacher salaries in South Dakota. Fact is, there never has been.

People in the education field feel discouraged. They interpret this refusal to pay more as a sign of disrespect.

When we as taxpayers are unwilling to tax ourselves more to pay our teachers more, is that disrespect?

When the governor and the Legislature take more than three years to restore a funding cut, is that disrespect?

Disrespect is a difficult question for us to ask about us.

We don't have facts that show pay is a reason we have shortages of teachers, especially qualified teachers who are good.

We should get those facts.

We also should get facts showing real costs for the different levels of quality in teachers.

Then we as taxpayers can decide what level of teacher quality we are willing to support.

Our federal deficit shows us that, at the national level, we the taxpayers don't elect people who are willing to spend within our nation's means.

Yet we keep sending these people, regardless of political party. It shows that we aren't willing to accept that we should pay what things actually cost.

When it comes to our schools and teachers, we don't rely on debt for the salaries and ongoing expenses.

We give them what they get to spend. This is local control. We value it.

We base these spending decisions on what we think we can afford now and what we think we as a people can tolerate now.

We don't ask whether we are being disrespectful of our teachers or our children.

## U.S. Chamber Vs. The U.S.

BY MICHELLE MALKIN

Creators Syndicate

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is a politically entrenched synod of special interests. These fat cats do not represent the best interests of American entrepreneurs, American workers, American parents and students, or Americans of any race, class or age who believe in low taxes and limited government. The chamber's business is the big business of the Beltway, not the business of mainstream America.

If you are a business owner who believes your country should strictly and consistently enforce its borders and deport illegal immigrants who violate the terms of their visas, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce doesn't represent you.

If you are a worker who believes the feds should punish illegal aliens who use fake documents to obtain jobs instead of rewarding them with "legal status," the U.S. Chamber of Commerce doesn't champion you.

If you are a parent or educator who opposes top-down federal education schemes such as Common Core that undermine local control, dumb down rigorous curricula and threaten family privacy while enriching big business and lobbying groups, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce doesn't speak for you.

If you are a taxpayer who has had enough of crony capitalism and publicly funded bailouts of failing corporations, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce doesn't work for you.

Last year, the chamber poured more than \$52 million into K Street lobbying efforts on behalf of illegal alien amnesty, Fed Ed Common Core programs and increased federal spending. This year, chamber bigwigs are paving the perilous pathway to GOP capitulation. The left hardly needs to lift a finger against tea party candidates and activists who are bravely challenging the big government status quo. The chamber has already volunteered to spend \$50 million subsidizing the Republican incumbency protection racket and attacking anti-establishment conservatives.

Allow me to say, "I told you so." In 2010, when President Barack Obama hypocritically attacked the chamber for accepting "foreign donations" just before the midterm elections, many on the right rushed to the group's side. But as I warned then, the purported enemy of my enemy is ... sometimes my worst enemy. Barely three months after their Kabuki campaign fight, Obama and the chamber had already kissed and made up.

The chamber joined hands with the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations on a joint campaign to support

Obama's increased government infrastructure and spending proposals, stuffed with Big Labor payoffs.

The chamber is one of the staunchest promoters of mass illegal immigration, and joined with the AFL-CIO and American Civil Liberties Union to oppose immigration enforcement measures.

The chamber opposed Ever-ify and sued Arizona over its employer sanctions law.

The chamber supported a pro-Obama-macare, pro-TARP, pro-stimulus, pro-amnesty Democrat in Arizona over his free-market GOP challenger.

The chamber supported the George W. Bush/Obama TARP, the Bush/Obama auto bailout and the billion-dollar, pork-stuffed stimulus.

This isn't about letting the best ideas and businesses thrive. It's about picking winners and losers. It's about "managing" competition and engineering political outcomes under the guise of stimulating the economy and supporting "commerce." What's in it for the statist businesses that go along for the ride with Obama and his team of corruptocrats? Like they say in the Windy City: It's all about the boodle — publicly subsidized payoffs meted out to the corruptocrats' friends and special interests.

In the case of Common Core, the chamber has made common cause with the left-wing, corporate-bashing Center for American Progress in a new Baptists and Bootleggers coalition. They are seemingly strange bedfellows who both profit from increased federal government intervention. For giant corporate publishers, such as Pearson and other big-business ventures backed by the chamber, it's all about cashing in on the public schools' Common Core captive guinea pigs in testing, teaching, data collection and data analysis.

For big government advocacy groups, such as CAP, it's all about diminishing state, local and parental control over local education and curricular decisions; expanding Washington's regulatory reach into the classroom; and ensuring the perpetuation of the Fed Ed bureaucracy.

When businesses get in the government hand-out line, it's not a "public-private partnership." It's corporate welfare. Venture socialism. Whatever you call it, it stinks as much under Democrat administrations as it does under Republican ones.

Always beware of Washington business-boosters wearing false free-market facades.

*Michelle Malkin is the author of "Culture of Corruption: Obama and his Team of Tax Cheats, Crooks and Cronies" (Regnery 2010). Her e-mail address is malkinblog@gmail.com.*



Michelle  
**MALKIN**