

## THEIRS

# Hoghouse gives encore to playhouse

When in trouble, bring in an actor.

The Black Hills Playhouse did exactly that last week by sending gifted thespian Graham Thatcher onto the slippery stage of legislative theater to call for a new lease on life for the playhouse in Custer State Park.

But Thatcher wasn't a troupe of one when he appeared before the Senate State Affairs Committee in the South Dakota Capitol Friday morning. He had some un-theatrical assistance from



Kevin WOSTER

Playhouse lobbyist Jim Hood of Spearfish, a lawyer and former legislator known for making off-stage arguments that are both subtle and effective. The starring role went to Dave Knudson, a Se- date Sioux Falls business lawyer who is, by the realities of a gubernatorial campaign, learning the personal side of the performing arts. He also is prime sponsor of SB102, late-arriving legislation that would do what the playhouse and the state Game, Fish & Parks Department have been unable to do for a couple of years: settle a dispute over the playhouse lease in the park.

Few playhouse productions have been more entertaining – for those not directly involved, of course – as this long-running melodrama. Few have been so unproductive, either.

Separating the heroes and villains is a difficult chore for a mass-media audience. So is answering the most relevant question: "How did you guys let it come to this?"

It's a question aimed at the playhouse, GF&P officials and the man behind the Custer State Park curtain: Gov. Mike Rounds.

The governor is mostly mum on this stormy production, particularly since the playhouse took the dispute to court. But he is clearly invested in ways that are hard to define. He doesn't, with good reason, like the shape of the playhouse campus, its location, or its past financial failures. But while he says he wants to help, often he seems not to.

That's all a silent movie of old to Knudson, who has today's play to worry about. He says SB102 could offer the playhouse a "last chance" to maintain its 63-year-old connection to the cozy-if-collapsing campus in the park.

Knudson created the bill through a legislative maneuver called hoghousing, which dates back to the early 1900s. Lawmakers then were beyond the bill deadline when they decided to fund a swine building at the college of agriculture. They re-wrote an existing bill, giving birth to "hoghouse," the noun, and "hoghouse" or "hoghousing," the verbs.

SB102 is a simply worded hoghouse with complex implications. If forces GF&P into a 10-year playhouse lease. But Knudson wants an amendment forcing the playhouse to prove it can pay for needed improvements at the dilapidated campus, or lose it.

GF&P officials were stung by the 6-3 committee vote for SB102 but heartened by Knudson's amendment idea. They don't speak, however, for the governor. He holds the veto, which would require two-thirds of both chambers to override.

Knudson won't speculate on the chances of a veto or override. He first has to amend the bill and get it approved by the Senate and House. House Democratic leader Bernie Hunhoff of Yankton likes the bill and even the chances of a veto override. "I would like to think so," Hunhoff said. "Any time you get Black Hills Republicans and East River Democrats working toward the same goal, you're well on the road."

It's a winding route, that playhouse road, in both geography and politics. But Knudson thinks it will be worth the ride if a performing arts tradition is saved.

"The playhouse has been there for six decades," he said. "It'll be a shame if it can't stay."

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## OURS

# Censure hearing a vindictive farce

**THE ISSUE:** Rapid City Council voted 6-3 early Wednesday to censure Alderman Sam Kooiker.

**OUR VIEW:** This orchestrated six-hour payback was a waste of time and taxpayer money and only makes Kooiker more popular.

At its worst, it was undignified and vindictive.

At its best ... well, there was no best. Nothing positive came from the six-hour censure hearing held by the Rapid City Council Tuesday night.

Council members publicly flogged Alderman Sam Kooiker Tuesday night and into Wednesday morning, under the pretext of a fair hearing.

It had all the makings of a trial, and yet Kooiker wasn't able to face his accuser. Rapid Transit manager Rich Sagen – who filed the initial grievance against Kooiker for intimidation and harassment – was permitted to skip the meeting, and had a statement read on his behalf.

In fact, Kooiker and his lawyer weren't allowed to question anyone, not Sagen, not Public Works Director Robert Ellis, not City Attorney Jason Green, not the mayor.

Instead, he was forced to defend himself against presumed guilt – so predetermined that councilwoman Karen Gunderson Olson came to the meeting with her prewritten final comments. Her mind was made up to censure Kooiker before ever listening to the evidence, the explanations, or the public.



Kristina Barker/Rapid City Journal

The Rapid City Council voted 6-3 to censure fellow alderman Sam Kooiker Tuesday night during a public censure hearing which ended at 2:37 a.m..

At times, it was difficult to watch.

There was the mayor serving as pseudo-circuit court judge, scolding the audience, and repeating the same instructions to the participants so often that it made a 10th grade mock trial look professional. Here he was, the man who edged out Kooiker in a bitter mayoral race just two years earlier, now helping hold his adversary up to public embarrassment.

The mayor would not let members of the public name specific members of council during the public comment period, ensuring that the only council member to be criticized by name Tuesday night would be Kooiker. He cut off Kooiker and his lawyer repeatedly, not allowing them to expand on an answer, and yet some councilors were given more latitude. The mayor's double standard hit a low point when he gave in to bullying councilor Deb Hadcock who was insistent on grandstanding in order to take her pound of flesh from her fellow Ward 2 representative.

This seemed to be payback for a few of them, a way of sending a

message to Kooiker that his style was not acceptable. Does Kooiker play politics almost as well as the mayor? Probably. Does Kooiker always follow proper procedure when looking for answers on behalf of his constituents? No. Does he make some of his quests public when they could be handled privately? Yes.

Sagen called it harassment.

We would call it persistence.

But in an effort to get answers on behalf of his constituents, he upset a few city department heads who are uncomfortable with being held accountable.

And so they paid him back this week.

Ellis and Green produced over 1,000 pages of e-mails in an attempt to paint Kooiker as obsessive and micromanaging. But they opted to print out e-mails of lunch dates and shared photos, counted each reply to a reply to a reply as a separate document, and misrepresented the time frame of the e-mails. In the end, Alderman Bill Waugh convinced others on the council to remove references to the amount of e-mails, knowing that the city had embellished its findings to fur-

ther its case.

They charged him with sending too many e-mails, and yet there is no maximum in the Code of Conduct. They intimated that Kooiker had purposely set out to embarrass Sagen in a Public Works meeting, but they never found the proof. Hadcock chastised Kooiker for only speaking with five Transit employees about morale issues in the department, and yet the city's hired legal counsel admitted only speaking with two during his investigation.

If Kooiker wasn't already the most beloved member of the council, he is now, and Tuesday's debacle only made him a much stronger force in the city. He was censured for trying to get answers for why the city is misusing taxpayer dollars, trying to get answers on behalf of constituents – some of whom packed council chambers and stayed until the bitter early morning end.

As each of them took the podium, many noted they weren't in Sam's ward but they called him for help because he – unlike their own representatives – would call them back. It did not go unnoticed that the people of this city spoke on Kooiker's behalf; only current and former city officials spoke on Sagen's behalf.

Alderman Malcom Chapman pointed out that the council should work as a team, not as individuals. We would agree. Chapman and others should join Kooiker in getting answers for their constituents, ensuring taxpayer dollars are spent wisely, and being the checks and balances for a city which is adrift without a city manager.

They spent six hours crucifying Sam Kooiker Tuesday.

But they wound up creating a martyr.

## YOURS

### Nisland family wants public insurance option

Mr. Nabholz threw an awfully wide loop (2/3/10) when he claimed Senator Johnson is not listening to the people of South Dakota because the senator supports the public health care option. We and our seven grown children support the public option. We are South Dakotans!

Our health insurance costs over \$11,000 per year (\$1,250 deductibles). In December 2008, we had one outpatient procedure and January 2009, one trip to the emergency room for a kidney stone (high-tech treatment: shot of morphine and admonition: "go home and drink water"). The bills insurance didn't cover soared to \$3800. Jan. 1, deductibles started over, premiums rose 5 percent; now we pay 12 percent interest and monthly payments for the 2008-09 uncovered costs.

Medical costs and insurance premiums are disproportionate with the earnings of teachers, family farmers, small business owners, many professional and blue-collar workers. People work second jobs just to pay insurance, and still many avoid going to the doctor because they can't pay deductibles.

Senator Johnson, thank you for supporting the public option. We can't match the campaign contributions of the insurance industry, but we can give you something more powerful in our democracy than their dollars. You have our votes.

BERNARD and LAURIE BARNAUD Nisland

### Kundert invites all to TARs 50th anniversary

For almost five decades I have been involved with the Teen Age Republicans (TAR), an organization that has helped thousands of students become better citizens and leaders. This summer, the Teen Age Republicans will be celebrating its 50th anniversary, and I need your help!

Over the years many people in your area have been invited to TARs, and I want to invite them to a party in Rapid City on July 23, 2010 to celebrate the 50th TAR anniversary. If you are a former

TAR, can you visit [www.sdtars.com](http://www.sdtars.com) for more information and let me know you are coming? If you know a former TAR, can you ask him or her to visit [www.sdtars.com](http://www.sdtars.com) for more information and let me know they are coming?

Apathy affects too many young people, and for decades TAR has been waking young people up to the important world of politics and service. Please help me spread the word so that we can properly honor that tradition at the 50th anniversary! If you have questions, feel free to contact Public Utilities Commissioner and current state TAR advisor Dusty Johnson at [stateadvisor@sdtars.com](mailto:stateadvisor@sdtars.com) or at 605-280-5511. Thanks for your help!

ALICE KUNDERT Mobridge

### Her heroes have always been teachers, reporters

Thanks, Woster, for speaking up for those of us not present in that men's locker room where the guy said he would kill President Obama if he knew he were near death himself. Your words took courage. Often that's what it takes to do what's right. I'm proud it was a reporter who took that step, but then you all, along with teachers, have long been my heroes.

MURIEL SHEPHERD Rapid City

### Council's assassination of Sam Kooiker a shame

I was unable to attend the assassination meeting but I have some thoughts about it.

First, I guess it was appropriate that the affair was done during the month of February, also know as Black History Month, because it is a black eye for the City of Rapid City.

Second, for those of you that remember the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago and the gang of 7, well now Rapid City has its own gang of 6 that carried out a reprehensible act.

I would encourage the voters in all the wards to take note of who voted for the assassination and kick their backsides out in their

next election.

The hearing was more a commentary on the lack of leadership and management abilities that your mayor and public works director have over their employees. The mayor and public works director should be the ones being chastised for lack of leadership. This is another good reason for Rapid City to go to the City Manager form of government.

FRED WEISHAUPL Rapid City

### Tale of lion and Labrador saddens dog, lion lover

An immature lion left motherless – a hungry, untrained lion – a poor lab being killed. How sad. As a dog lover, my heart goes out to the family. A few years ago I had the opportunity to visit with a mountain lion biologist. She was shocked that female lions with kittens less than two years old could be hunted and killed in South Dakota. This biologist stated that Mother Nature knows what it is doing to have lion cubs stay with their mothers for two years. This is imperative to their learning to hunt properly. She further stated, "as young are abandoned before they are two, you will see mountain lions preying on things they normally do not prey on. Like pets?"

Now we are beginning to see that happen. As more and more young lions are left with little or no hunting skills, we will have more people wanting all the lions killed. All because we decided to *harvest* (a deceiving, sickening word) instead of manage lions.

What was the matter with disposing or moving lions that were a threat to people, pets and livestock, (as done in the past) instead of seeking out lions that a human may never see and killing it, leaving the young abandoned, waiting for their mother, waiting to learn to hunt. Starving, lonely, desperate. This is cruel and just plain wrong.

A true hunter hunts for the sport and the meat. A lion hunter hunts to brag that he/she killed a lion. When did humans become so heartless?

ARLETTE SCHWEITZER Keystone

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