

RAPID CITY JOURNAL'S TOP 10 STORIES OF 2010

Noem beats incumbent in U.S. House race

1 In 2006 and 2008, U.S. Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin won elections by such lopsided margins that many people expected her to leverage her popularity into a run for governor. When she opted to instead seek re-election to Congress, it was seen as a safer choice.

Kristi Noem begged to differ. After beating out a popular secretary of state and a well-funded Sioux Falls lawmaker in the Republican primary, Noem jumped out to a lead in the polls and rode a wave of voter dissatisfaction all the way to a victory on Nov. 2.

Now, Noem is preparing to take the oath of office while Herseth Sandlin is packing her bags.

Noem's message that Herseth Sandlin was enabling liberal

congressional Democrats led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi persuaded an electorate angry at Washington, D.C.

Noem's only serious obstacle was the revelation of her history of traffic violations, which momentarily vaulted Herseth Sandlin back in front. Noem also benefited from strong fundraising, matching Herseth Sandlin's efforts in a much shorter period of time. Spending by outside groups also heavily favored Noem.

A 7,114 vote victory over Herseth Sandlin on Nov. 2 wasn't the end of Noem's rise, either. Within weeks of her election, Noem's new congressional colleagues elected her into the House leadership.

The difficult job of governing begins after Noem is sworn in Jan. 3.

— David Montgomery



File photos

Republican challenger Kristi Noem, left, beat Democratic incumbent Stephanie Herseth Sandlin for South Dakota's only seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.



File photo

Smoking is no longer permitted in bars, casinos and restaurants in South Dakota after voters passed Referred Law 12 in November.

Voters extend smoking ban to bars, casinos, restaurants

2 South Dakota joined 27 other states in 2010 in becoming smoke-free.

In November, Referred Law 12 received 64 percent of the vote, snuffing out smoking in most public areas in the state.

The ban prohibits smoking in bars, restaurants, video lottery businesses

and casinos.

The vote broadened the existing ban, passed in 2002, which banned smoking indoors in public facilities and private workplaces unless those establishments had alcohol licenses.

Dr. Allen Nord, chairman of the South Dakota Tobacco Free Kids Network, lauded the vote as a step toward

making South Dakota a healthier state. But opponents of the law called the vote detrimental to business.

The Deadwood Gaming Association said it may ask the state Legislature in 2011 to revise the ban to allow designated smoking rooms in casinos.

— Lynn Taylor Rick

PUC approves 12.7 percent rate hike for BH Power

4 Electric consumers' frustrations grew this year with their Black Hills Power bills.

The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission unanimously approved a 12.7 percent rate increase for Black Hills Power customers in July, which was less than the 26.6 percent increase the utility requested in September 2009.

But customers were still hit with a 20 percent interim rate hike in April.

PUC Chairman Dusty Johnson described the interim increase as a "classic Catch-22." The utility had the authority to implement it, since 180 days had lapsed from the filing date of its request for a permanent increase of 26.6 percent. If the PUC shot down the 20 percent hike, Black Hills Power could implement the 26.6 percent increase as the interim rate.

The PUC's final decision meant Black Hills Power customers received some good news in the form of a refund because the new rate was lower than the interim rate. The refund appeared as credits on customers' bills.

— Holly Meyer



File photo

Steve Clift expresses anger about Black Hills Power's rate increases during a community discussion in March.

Rush claim Central Hockey League championship

3 In one year, the Rapid City Rush went from out of the playoffs to out of this world.

After marginal progress in its first season, Rapid City won the Ray Miron President's Cup in its sophomore campaign in the Central Hockey League.

Scott Wray's goal in the waning moments of double overtime clinched the Cup in Game 6 of a thrilling final series with the Allen (Texas) Americans.

The Rush advanced to the finals after a seven-game series with the Bossier-Shreveport (La.) Mudbugs.

With the championship came numerous awards, including Joe Ferras being named top coach, goalie Danny Battocchio being chosen as the league's best rookie, Les Reaney earning honors as playoff MVP and the fans being named the best in the CHL.

Even the cacophonous clank of countless cowbells wasn't enough to cure "Rush Fever" in 2010.

— Danny Lawhon



File photo

Luke Fritshaw celebrates winning the Ray Miron President's Cup with his teammates. The Rush defeated the Allen Americans 4-3 in double overtime to win the cup.



File photo

Ward 2 Alderman Sam Kooiker was censured by fellow Rapid City Council members in February. The move cost some aldermen their seats on the council.

Rapid City council members censure one of their own

5 The Rapid City Council voted on hundreds, if not thousands, of issues in 2010, but for many city residents, its most important decision had nothing to do with a new project or policy.

In the early morning hours of Feb. 17, the city council voted 6-3 to censure Ward 2 Alderman Sam Kooiker.

Kooiker has been elected handily in each of his five campaigns for office and came within 685 votes of the mayor's office in 2007. But his hands-on, questioning style has also caused conflict with city staff and other elected officials.

A grievance filed by the city's transit manager and allegations that Kooiker knowingly lied in a public meeting led to his public reprimand for violating the Rapid City Code of Conduct for Elected Officials.

Four months later, Kooiker was re-elected without facing a challenger, and half of the aldermen in favor of censure were gone from council. Malcom Chapman and Karen Gundersen Olson opted not to run. Lloyd LaCroix lost his seat to Jordan Mason, who campaigned against the censure.

— Emilie Rusch

Seven men indicted in alleged Fish Garbage landfill fraud case

6 The news of the Fish Garbage Service indictments exploded in March through Rapid City.

Three months after the city filed a civil lawsuit against the now-defunct garbage hauler, seven Rapid City men were indicted by a Pennington County grand jury on felony charges, accused of conspiring to cheat the Rapid City Landfill out of more than \$100,000 in tipping fees over seven years.

The defendants ranged from the hauler's owners, Clifford Fish and George Fish, to a former landfill employee, Randall Meidinger, to four Fish truck drivers, Harold Steen, Steven Pope, Matthew Gibson and Charles Cordes.

George Fish was also accused of bribing a public official and Meidinger of

accepting a bribe.

By the end of the year, a second set of felony charges, this time for aggravated grand theft, had come down on six defendants. Meidinger also faced an additional aggravated grand theft charge and five counts of forgery.

The seventh defendant, Cordes, was found dead in June near Falling Rock.

Trials in the case will begin in February 2011, with 7th Circuit Judge Thomas Trimble presiding.

Meidinger will be the first to stand trial Feb. 22, followed by the three former Fish drivers, beginning March 23. The trial for father and son George and Clifford Fish and their company is tentatively set to begin April 18.

— Emilie Rusch



File photo

Rapid City filed a civil lawsuit against the now-defunct Fish Garbage Service. Seven men were later indicted for alleged fraud.