

East River-West River divide persists in S. Dakota Legislature

Postmortems after each session of the South Dakota Legislature usually include talk of regional conflict between legislators.

Sioux Falls-area lawmakers often sense a bias against them. Rural and West River legislators point east to Sioux Falls, saying it's anti-agriculture.

Getting legislators to talk about the problem is a lot easier than pulling teeth.

"It is absolutely worse now than it has ever been," said state Sen. Bill Napoli, R-Rapid City. "Sioux Falls has some extraordinary legislators, and they are well-educated — some cases overeducated. A lot of legislators, including me, are not on the same page with some of them."

He cites Rep. Deb Peters,

R-Hartford, as an example.

"She is a very bright, talented, sharp, outgoing young lady who is fearless, but she has flatly intimidated legislators from other areas," Napoli said. "I am impressed with her, but she is like dealing with Bill Janklow in his younger days. She comes on a little strong."

That could be the impression left by her broad knowledge of government, Peters said.

"I don't know if I was intimidating, but I am pretty sure I shocked a few. Maybe I come off a little headstrong, but I say what I believe, and I don't back

down," she said.

It is time for those on all sides of the ongoing quarrel to try to understand each other, Napoli said.

"I have a certain amount of jealousy toward Sioux Falls because it is so successful. We in Rapid City don't have that, and we need to learn from Sioux Falls," Napoli said.

Cross-state disputes are hard to get one's arms around, said state Sen. Dick Kelly, R-Sioux Falls.

"But I feel they have an attitude that we have plenty of money, and we can do our own thing. Take the entertainment tax. They come to town, pay it, but

you have all the money. You have \$100 million in (facilities) being planned, and the rest of the state can't even fathom that

kind of money," Kelly said.

Agricultural issues can divide regions, said state Sen. Gene Abdallah, R-Sioux Falls.

"I see more of an agricultural-versus-metropolitan division. I vote with the agricultural-rancher groups when I think they are right and against them when I think they are wrong, but it doesn't work the other way very much. It is more an East River-West River thing, and that is not very

healthy," Abdallah said.

Sen. Julie Bartling, D-Burke, moved to the Senate this session after two terms in the House. She said she saw the conflict more in the House.

"I agree, it is a definite line. It is not just Sioux Falls, but Rapid City legislators, too. If it is an agriculture-related bill, it is tough for them to vote for it," she said.

Bartling said she tries to consider the value of legis-

lators saw it as a property-rights bill," she said.

"When I first came to the House, people said the Missouri River does not divide the state, but that is very wrong. It definitely divides."

Regional disputes between lawmakers is nothing new, said George Valentine, who has been lobbying legislators for 25 years.

"This is the land of infinite variety — so many interests, so many lifestyles in South Dakota. That can create hard feelings. Whether you talk about prairie dogs or Phillips to the Falls, legislators try to represent the people who put them there," Valentine said.

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