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North Dakota Intelligencer: July 25, 1994

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Grand Forks Herald

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The North Dakota *Intelligencer*

An inside report on people, politics & power

Volume 3

July 25, 1994

Number 8



The people's chancellor

Appointment of Isaak causes grumbling in academia, but he's respected in Bismarck

The Board of Higher Education made the best of an untenable situation this month when it picked **Larry Isaak** to be chancellor. Anything the board did would have been subject to criticism, but at least Isaak's selection keeps things calm vis a vis the Legislature, where higher education's biggest battles are fought.

Isaak had been with the system 10 years, coming over from the Office of Management and Budget. As vice chancellor for administrative and student affairs, he was the budget expert, the man you turned to for straight answers. Indeed, his reputation is such that the Nevada university and community college system offered him a vice chancellorship in Reno to oversee the budget. He turned the job down some months ago.

Lawmakers we've talked to generally applaud Isaak's choice, although **Bob Boyd** had his strong supporters. Boyd is UND's director of outreach programs and was a finalist for the chancellor's position. The unwillingness to reconsider Boyd leaves the impression that professional or parochial courtesy contributed to that status. A search committee also recommended **Sandra Featherman**, vice chancellor at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, although the board didn't review her for appointment.

But the die was cast after **Bruce Bergland**, the man of many jobs at the University of Colorado at Denver, pulled out of a chancellor's position he had already accepted. His reasons, stated as personal, are still unknown to the board. Suffice to say, he won't be getting any letters of recommendation from North Dakota.

Returning to a national search while a legislative session approached would have enervated the university system, or at least distracted it. Then there's no guarantee



Larry Isaak

of a positive outcome. The first time around, the process led to three finalists, two who dropped out, forcing the board to pick **Doug Treadway**, who left after two years.

Nor did it make sense to keep things on an interim basis, thereby undercutting any authority Isaak might have. One needs some stability, argued **Paul Ebeltoft**, a Dickinson lawyer who has emerged as the most vocal member of the board. **Patricia Hill** of Bismarck added that Isaak's selection in no way suggested the single system was in trouble.

But faculty critics certainly pose valid questions. If a national search is intended to get a national academic leader at a nationally competitive salary, what is the board doing when it, in a single stroke, gives the same \$120,000 to a local candidate lacking academic leadership experience? (Isaak was earning \$87,800 a year.) Is the board saying that coming up through the campus academic system carries little value? Are academic

concerns now secondary to budget concerns?

The significance of academic credentials in the university system manifests itself this way: If you've earned a doctorate, you are called a doctor, every time. Campus meetings sometimes sound like an AMA convention.

The board and Isaak respond that the academic duties are the province of **Gene Kemper**, that is, Dr. Gene Kemper. The board confirmed Isaak's appointment of Kemper as vice chancellor for academic affairs, increasing his salary from \$94,760 to \$101,000. A faculty member points out that a University of North Dakota search committee passed over Kemper as a finalist for vice president for academic affairs, a position now held by **Marlene Strathe**. So now he's qualified for a higher job he got through appointment, not a competitive search? Kemper had been considering retirement.

A lot of these questions went unaddressed at the board meeting in Wahpeton, where Isaak's selection was delivered as a fait accompli. The board has a tendency to decide things beforehand and then justify the decision in the public discussions, thereby failing to address the potential negatives. Last year's retirements of **Jim Ozbun** as president of North Dakota State University and **Al Watrel** from Dickinson State were handled just this way. After making the announcement, board members stood up and applauded, saying what a great decision had just been made. This approach fosters public distrust.

Finally, although Isaak and the board say it's not the case, giving him a two-year contract does undermine his authority. Faculty members grumble, but then say, well, it's a two-year appointment. The Associated Press refers to his job as a special two-year appointment.

Higher ed budget sniping abates

Higher education's new chancellor, **Larry Isaak**, minimizes disagreements with the governor's office over the budget, saying they hardly represent a chasm. There has been less sniping lately, although Gov. **Ed Schafer** was puzzled, to say the least, at the Board of Higher Education's decision to abandon the job qualifications for chancellor.

The board did not notify Schafer beforehand about Isaak's hiring, either.

The board refused Schafer's request to prepare a 1995-97 budget at 95 percent of current spending. Isaak says the budget process nevertheless resembles what other executive branch agencies are undertaking. After all, they get to submit an optional budget package that includes all their requests for additional spending. The packages are due Aug. 15.

OMB Director **Rod Backman** acknowledges these wish

lists might undercut the original message of budget restraint, but says the agencies are at least going through the exercise — the discipline — of preparing a 95 percent budget. That's not the case with higher education.

Still, signs point to higher education doing all right in Schafer's budget and the 1995 session.

Although . . . the Legislative Audit and Fiscal Review Committee was its usual cranky self recently when looking at several university issues. Sen. **Bryce Streibel**, R-Fessenden, objected to a proposal to prepare a system-wide audit rather than the current campus by campus. The Legislature keeps turning over its oversight responsibilities to other groups, he argued.

The system office concludes that a single, system-wide audit would save cost and time and be more uniform, but less time would be spent verifying the accuracy of financial information at smaller institutions. (Warning bells.)

Of campaigns and their financing

The Associated Press observes that Sen. **Kent Conrad's** campaign is sensitive about charges that most of his re-election money comes from outside the state. His latest filing with the Federal Election Commission carries a note to interested parties that 674 of the 853 individual campaign contributions this year came from North Dakota residents.

Can one reach the same conclusion about Rep. **Earl Pomeroy**? His campaign sent out a press release touting the fact that 622 individual North Dakotans contributed to the Democrat's campaign within the last month, 1,513 for the year. (Total contributors numbered 1,827.) His FEC submission includes every single individual contribution although federal law asks only for those of \$200 or more. The smaller contributors are overwhelmingly North Dakotan.

Pomeroy asserts the contributions reflect support for his positive agenda that includes "attacking wasteful spending, protecting seniors, fighting the growth of crime and making sure health reform works for North Dakota."

Here's the kicker: "Not being a millionaire, I can't fund this campaign out of my personal checkbook. The help of friends and supporters is critical for me to be able to run an effective campaign in the fall."

Although not mentioned by name, the millionaire is state Rep. **Gary Porter**, Pomeroy's Republican opponent. The latest FEC reports show the Minot businessman had loaned — or guaranteed a loan — his campaign \$102,000 through June 30. Debts and obligations stood at \$74,500. For the year, Porter had raised \$55,056, with

only \$500 coming from a political action committee, the AMOCO PAC.

Porter's campaign had \$6,208 in cash on hand through June 30, compared with \$243,983 for Pomeroy. For the year, Pomeroy had raised \$262,547, of that \$75,878 from PACS.

Porter's campaign is attempting to tar Pomeroy as beholden to special interests. (The GOP has bought copies of his FEC reports.) At a Fargo news conference on unfair Canadian grain imports, Porter mocked Pomeroy's statement his vote wasn't for sale on NAFTA. "The incredible hypocrisy of Earl Pomeroy's statement quickly became clear when it was revealed he had accepted more than \$110,000 in campaign contributions from the labor unions who were leading the charge to defeat NAFTA." One still has to wonder about a campaign whose theme is, "I would have bargained away my vote."

Should things deteriorate, look for a contest between "pawn of the PACs" versus "millionaire out to buy an election."

Conrad, too, is coming under Republican attacks for getting money from out-of-state PACs. In a typical day-late news release, GOP Chairman **John Korsmo** said, "This blatant disregard for the people of North Dakota is getting very tiresome. When 94 percent of a senator's campaign funds come from PAC contributions, you have to question where his support is and just who it is he's voting for." Korsmo makes these statements, rather than Republican candidate Dr. **Ben Clayburgh**, because the Grand Forks doctor is subject to attacks for getting money from out-of-state doctors.

From May 26 to June 30, Clayburgh

received \$133,059 in contributions, with at least \$57,850 from doctors — a majority from outside North Dakota — and \$10,000 from medical-related PACs. Conrad raised \$146,792 during the same reporting period, including \$137,334 from PACs. At least \$34,500 came from PACs associated with health care.

Conrad has been consistent on the issue, saying that PAC donations are some of the cleanest money around, allowing workers and others to pool their resources to become politically active.

Bottom line: Conrad's campaign had \$949,563 in cash on hand, Clayburgh's had \$15,418, with \$20,000 in debts. Conrad's edge is reflected in the campaign's willingness to donate \$5,000 to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Clayburgh's pre-convention claims he'd match Conrad dollar for dollar are unfulfilled. (Clayburgh did get \$1,000 from **William Marcil**, publisher of the Forum of Fargo-Moorhead, although the Forum endorsed Conrad last election.)

The latest reporting period also saw the sugar PACS sweeten the pot. During the year, Conrad has received \$8,500 from seven sugar-related PACS, including \$2,500 from American Crystal Sugar.

A few addenda: Clayburgh's forms show the campaign ambulance was bought for \$1,900 from Walhalla State Bank. Insurance cost \$821. Clayburgh paid state Rep. **Clare Carlson**, R-Grand Forks, \$1,500 for pre-convention consulting. Bill for convention balloons: \$3,310. Defeated Republican candidate **David Vanderscoff** ended his campaign with a \$137,500 debt.

Fly the fawning skies of Northwest

What does Northwest Airlines want from Sen. **Kent Conrad**?

If this seems a familiar question, it's because we asked the same about Sen. **Byron Dorgan** a few issues ago, following a flattering article in "Northwest Airlines World," the monthly in-flight magazine.

The July issue does the same for Conrad in a three-page piece. It begins:

"It's no wonder that Senator Kent Conrad admires the tenacity and character of basketball legend-turned-minor league baseball player **Michael Jordan**. The North Dakota Democrat shares Jordan's kind of impenetrable mental toughness and discipline. They are characteristics Conrad developed in a childhood punctuated by tragedy." Then follows the story of how Conrad lost his parents in a car wreck when he was five.

"Conrad emerged from his upbringing with a degree of analytical and moral fortitude that eventually earned him a seat in the Senate." The story includes an account on the mugging of Conrad's wife, **Lucy Calautti**, and how that steered his resolve to fight crime.

Every issue features a positive profile of this nature on some member of Congress from states served by Northwest. Both parties get coverage. The strategy makes a lot of sense politically for Northwest, although we can't imagine any direct quid pro quo.

This being an election year, does the airline have to report it as a campaign contribution, an in-kind donation? Nope, even in-flight glossies enjoy First Amendment rights to flatter whom they chose.

The piece closes with Conrad's rumination on Michael Jordan: "I think Michael Jordan's willingness to go through the steps that everybody else has to go through — to go down to AA ball after being the greatest basketball player probably in the history of basketball, shows a lot of character," Conrad says.

"To succeed, Jordan will have to concentrate, and persevere through adversity — qualities that Conrad has in abundance."

Happy talk

The lyrics struck home: "Happy talking, talking, happy talk, talk about things you like to do."

Yes, a local theater group sang selections from South Pacific before Gov. **Ed Schafer** opened his latest

Hall talk

Capital for a Day in Devils Lake.

The meeting at the high school brought out more than 100 people, but was heavily dominated by local officialdom. Flooding, of course, is the main concern these days in the Devils Lake basin. The county and schools are particularly worried about road conditions, too, since harvest traffic and school bus travel are both coming up. As a member of the Devils Lake Preservation Coalition noted, if this flooding happened all at once, it would be a national story. The gradual nature of it discourages action from the feds.

Public relations motivates these Capitals for a Day, although the July one was not overtly partisan. Schafer introduced local Republican legislators and legislative candidates, praised them, but kept away from GOP campaign speeches.

Schafer says the Capitals for a Day remain popular, and enough cities have asked to have them that they can be scheduled through the remainder of his first term. They'll go on hiatus beginning in November and for the duration of the legislative session, that is, through April. Until then, West Fargo on Aug. 10; LaMoure on Sept. 14; and Kenmare on Oct. 12.

The Devils Lake Journal published a special insert to herald the event. (Papers in Washburn and Cavalier had done the same.) The 12-page tab included a schedule of events and biographies and photos of Schafer and his cabinet members. It also featured advertising, the *raison d'être* of these sections. Our favorite: "Welcome to Gov. Schafer, First Lady Nancy & Dignitaries. We hope your stay is an enjoyable one!" This from the local funeral home, with photo.

Schafer closes the days by giving local media a chance to ask questions. In Devils Lake, one reporter inquired about a supplier's lawsuit against Fish 'N Dakota, the first one in state. Schafer said he was surprised to see that in the news that morning, and conceded the arranged sale was taking longer than he had hoped, adding that potential buyers are out of state. In the meantime, the company continues to grow fish and sell fish, he said. (We hear on good authority that all

they've got left is brood stock.) In the meantime, the political hits continue dropping, like Chinese water torture.

Expensive venture

The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead is publishing a jazzy new weekly entertainment supplement, called "Rage." It's a nice looking piece of work, but probably not worth the price.

The total cost includes a legal settlement the company agreed to pay a Radisson employee probably libeled in a mock-up of "Rage." The tab includes a personality profile done in a Q and A format, with a photo, etc. The mock-up, to be shown to advertisers, did a piece on this female employee, humorously imputing all sort of libidinous behavior to her. Eight hundred copies were printed. Advertisers saw it. Lawsuits were mentioned.

So **Steve Waite**, the fellow who designed the tab, got fired. He's the former Sioux Falls Argus Leader graphics editor who helped redesign the Forum last year. Journalism is replete with anecdotes about fictitious stories ruining careers — the careers of journalists, that is.

North Dakota Online

Elsewhere in the media, the secretary of state's office has granted the Bismarck Tribune a service mark for an electronic bulletin board called "North Dakota Online." The Tribune was the first daily in the state to computerize its library, a necessary step toward giving the public access to stories and other information on-line. (The Forum and Grand Forks Herald have plans to change their libraries, as well.) Newspapers around the country are looking at alternative ways of delivering information, from E-mail to a gizmo that downloads pre-selected topics overnight.

A potential conflict: Schafer calls his electronic information initiative "Dakota Online."

Beg to differ

As one might expect, House Speaker **Rick Berg**, R-Fargo, disagrees with the assessment that he was hurt in the special session on tax breaks for the corn plant. On the contrary, he says quite politely, he felt very good about the three days. He adds that the efforts to fix the incentive bill were motivated not by partisan politics but the desire to do what's best for the state. (We never said they weren't. It's just that in a leadership position, partisanship is often *de rigueur*.)

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Disaster aid must go — next time

Just about everyone on Capitol Hill says disaster aid has got to go. It's expensive and tough to pay for.

"It has got to go," says Rep. **Earl Pomeroy**, D-N.D., who's leading the charge on crop insurance and disaster aid reform.

Other lawmakers, including the rest of North Dakota's congressional delegation, along with Rep. **Collin Peterson**, D-Minn., agree that current crop-insurance/disaster aid schemes should be revamped.

But not just yet. Georgia floods and plains rains forced lawmakers to postpone reform. Instead, they enacted precisely the kind of disaster aid they said they wanted to can.

A flood relief measure approved by both houses — capped at \$500 million — includes open-ended disaster assistance for North Dakota, Minnesota and other drowned-out prairie farmers.

"With losses mounting, this is great news for North Dakota farmers," gleams Pomeroy. But he quickly points out that the House Ag Committee — which he sits on — has OK'd a

Business beat

crop insurance reform bill that would make such ad hoc disaster assistance programs a lot harder to enact.

"We really need to get rid of this system of ad-hoc disaster relief," which simply bloats the federal debt, Pomeroy says. Any future disaster aid would be "pay-as-you-go."

"Taxes would have to be raised or spending cuts found in order to offset the (budgetary) impact of the disaster aid," Pomeroy says.

The rush to slash federal ag spending has already been felt in North Dakota. The state ranks first in the nation in the erosion of personal income this year, due mostly to shrinking federal wheat subsidies (North Dakota's No. 1 cash crop is wheat, worth about \$1.3 billion at the farm gate; wheat program payments amounted to \$285 million last year, roughly \$10,000 per farm, down from a 1990 peak of \$330 million).

Too wet for any whimsy

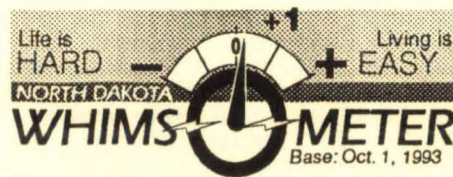
Water drowned whimsy this month.

Widespread flooding pushes the Whims-O-Meter down three whole points, putting it at just 1 point above its starting point.

Heavy rain washed out roads and did extensive damage in southeastern North Dakota. In the Devils Lake Basin, fields have been under water almost since they were planted, and another severe storm struck the area last week. In Grand Forks, steady rain early in the month brought the water table up and caused widespread seepage in basements. The surprise "underground flood" is reckoned to have caused more than \$2 million damage. And that doesn't count the drowned crops.

At the same time, plant diseases have reappeared. Farmers and officials are reluctant to make an assessment of how widespread problems might be, for fear of alarming the markets.

But a mood of fatalism has settled over eastern North Dakota farms, which were hard hit by something



called vomitoxin in the 1993 crop year.

Things are better in the west, as they were in 1993.

But a map of areas eligible for federal disaster assistance includes western areas among the more than 20 counties so far designated.

On top of that, environmentalists have singled out the state for criticism as an example of how the disaster program can be exploited. It seems North Dakota ranks second only to Texas in the amount of federal funds spent on disaster assistance. In some areas, disasters have struck in five of the last seven years.

Plus, there is a bumper crop of mosquitoes throughout the state.

So, even if it's summer time, the living ain't so easy in North Dakota.

Fortnightly update

Three additional ballot initiatives won approval for circulation from the secretary of state's office. One would repeal the seat belt law voters approved in last month's primary, another would impose term limits on those elected to statewide office and a third would prohibit anyone but the state from operating hazardous waste landfills. . . . The state canvassing board said 139,961 people, or about 30 percent of eligible voters, cast ballots in the state's June primary election. The election featured the first combined city and county elections statewide. . . . Gov. **Ed Schafer's** Beulah, N.D., fish farm is being sued by an Idaho company. Rangen Inc., an aquaculture products and service company based in Buhl, Idaho, says Fish 'N Dakota owes it \$21,284 for fish feed. The company filed suit in May. . . . A new state law meant to lure a corn processing plant to North Dakota will benefit a proposed Jamestown plant that will make french fries. Columbia Valley Foods will request an extended state property tax exemption under the new law, to help finance the \$50 million potato processing plant. . . . A federal judge dismissed a lawsuit filed by 19 abortion protesters and threatened to consider more severe sanctions if the protesters file a similar lawsuit in the future. The protestors alleged that they were falsely arrested and jailed for picketing outside the Fargo Women's Health Organization between March and November 1991. . . . Operators of the Dakota Landfill near Gwinner want the state's chief environmental regulator disqualified as a hearing officer in the company's bid to relax limits at its landfill. USA Waste Services Inc. argued that the chief regulator is biased, and his role as hearing officer would deprive the company of its due process rights. Attorney General **Heidi Heitkamp** said the company's request is an intimidation tactic, and she denied that the chief regulator was biased. . . . North Dakota researchers are developing ideas for mechanically harvesting broccoli. Agricultural Utilization and Research Institute said a goal of the research is to have a recommendation of a prototype machine that could be designed, built and tested in the field. . . . Grafton officials had to search for housing for about 300 workers on a petroleum pipeline. The employees are working on the portion of the pipeline that will run from the Canadian border at Neche, N.D., to Clearbrook, Minn. . . . The Board of Higher Education is asking the Legislature to spend \$15.6 million on new buildings for the 1995-97 budget period.