

VIEWPOINTS

For job creation, just add water

There's some good news and some bad news.

First the good – the new water treatment plant for the Lewis & Clark Regional Water System is up and running. The scores of people who have worked tirelessly for decades to help build this needed water project celebrated the completion of this facility at a dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony Tuesday.

The bad news? Well, the project is not yet complete. And, in fact, no one – not a politician from the three states that the water system serves, not its board of directors, not even Troy Larson, the executive director of the Lewis & Clark project – knows when all of the work will be done.

The biggest obstacle that Lewis & Clark officials must overcome is a shortage of revenue. And we're not talking about twisting arms at the state level, or trying to wrangle dollars from the member communities who are part of the system.

South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa have paid nearly all of what's expected from their state's coffers. So have the cities, towns and rural water systems that need the Missouri River water that's presently being prepared for consumption in the new treatment facility north of Vermillion.

There's nothing new about this funding flux facing the water system.

In July 2011, a bipartisan group of six U.S. Senators and three U.S. Representatives from Minnesota, Iowa, and South Dakota pressed the Obama Administration to pay its share of the cost of the Lewis and Clark Regional Water System and asked three top federal officials for a meeting to discuss the urgent need to bring adequate water supplies to the region.

Included in that group was South Dakota's entire Congressional delegation. Unfortunately, in the past year, very little has been accomplished to convince Washington officials to pony up the federal funds that have been authorized for the project.

State and local governments in the three states have paid over \$150 million – about 99 percent of their share. Lewis & Clark backers say the project will not only provide drinking water to more than 300,000 people in the three states, but also would unleash business expansion and job creation in the region that has been delayed because of inadequate water supplies.

The project is now 66 percent complete, but about \$200 million in federal appropriations is still needed to totally complete the water system.

Last summer, everyone's attention in the nation's capital was focused on averting an economic catastrophe when Congress began a big wrestling match over whether or not to raise the debt ceiling. An agreement was finally reached by President Barack Obama and congressional leaders from both parties last August that called for up to \$2.4 trillion in savings over the next decade, raised the debt ceiling through the end of 2012 and established a special congressional committee to recommend long-term fiscal reforms.

With this being election season, it's difficult to expect much more happening this year in Washington. And, in fact, some of the same old issues that caused such a stir a year ago on the federal level are scheduled to reoccur automatically if no progress is made.

It is the "fiscal cliff" that has been mentioned from time to

time, and no doubt will receive more and more attention as 2013 nears.

"Fiscal cliff" is the popular shorthand term used to describe the conundrum that the U.S.

BETWEEN THE LINES



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government will face at the end of 2012. U.S. lawmakers have a choice: they can either let current policy go into effect at the beginning of 2013 – which features a number of tax increases

and spending cuts that are expected to weigh heavily on growth and possibly drive the economy back into a recession – or cancel some or all of the scheduled tax increases and spending cuts, which would add to the deficit and increase the odds that the United States could face a crisis similar to that which is occurring in Europe.

The most likely result is another set of stop-gap measures that would delay a more permanent policy change until 2013 or later. The election will almost certainly have an impact on the direction of future policy, particularly if one party earns a decisive victory. Nevertheless, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that if Congress takes the middle ground – extending the Bush-era tax cuts but cancelling the automatic spending cuts – the result, in the short term, would be modest growth with no major economic hit.

In other words, it looks like we can expect more of the same from Washington in the near future. That's not good enough.

And sadly, we find ourselves having to repeat a plea that we made on our editorial page a year ago. We offered a suggestion to President Obama and members of Congress on how they could easily retain a number of existing jobs and increase the employment rate in our region by doing one simple thing.

Adequately fund the Lewis & Clark Water Project.

It's a no brainer. This project has been going on for years now, and workers have made great progress in laying water lines, putting the necessary equipment in place to draw water from the Missouri River and send it to the newly-completed water treatment plant.

For our region to prosper, our communities will need water from the Lewis & Clark system. That means we need action rather than political bickering from our leaders in Washington.

Sen. John Thune and Rep. Kristi Noem were gracious enough to attend Tuesday's dedication ceremonies of the new water treatment plant. Sen. Tim Johnson could not be present as his wife, Barb, is still recovering from a shoulder injury.

We urge everyone who may happen to see or communicate with Thune, Johnson and Noem this month to tell them to ratchet up the pressure for funding the Lewis & Clark Water Project.

Completing this needed infrastructure here on the Great Plains by doing nothing more than finding the needed funds is a rather simple way to quickly make progress as Congress and the White House turn their focus on jobs and our nation's lagging economy.



Consider being mobbed a good thing

Years ago, being mobbed might have landed you in the hospital, jail or worse yet, dead at the hands of gangsters or hoodlums. Today, the concept of being mobbed has taken on a whole new and, might I add, delightful meaning.

Packed with suspense from start to finish, the TV show "Mobbed" often leaves viewers in tears or at least with a deep sense of satisfaction over happy endings.

If you've never watched it, you're in for a real treat. Daring and devious host Howie Mandel, whose favorite show as a kid was "Candid Camera," puts the hidden-camera spin on the "flash mob" scene.

For those who don't watch much television, think of a flash mob as a surprise party on steroids with what appears to be a spontaneous public performance of song and dance. Like surprise parties, flash mobs begin suddenly with one person, grow to dozens and sometimes hundreds, who perform and then quickly disappear.

In the program "Mobbed," Mandel and his crew coordinate ordinary people along with professionals to help their special guests plan extraordinary surprises for friends, family or co-workers.

This reality show masterfully arranges significant moments, and dare I say, passages in life: confessions, vindications, proposals, acceptances, new beginnings and any number of responses to life's most painful and joyful milestones.

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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Unsuspecting stars are totally surprised at the climax of this real life drama: a husband learns his wife is pregnant, an applicant finds out she got the job, a guy proposes to his sweetheart or a father asks for forgiveness. These all play out stunningly in choreographed musical stories.

Throughout the hour, guests prepare and practice for their reveals, all the while receiving guidance and tips from Mandel. Then, on the big day, hidden cameras roll and the mob is set in motion.

Locally, residents of Le Mars, IA, have taken the idea of being mobbed to a new level with "cash mobs." Dozens of townspeople suddenly appear at local businesses, each spending at least \$20. A fantastic way to show support, cash mobs suddenly boost small business sales.

Flash mobs have been so successful in elevating people's spirits, why not arrange flash mobs for stay-at-home parents at their wits end over the 24-hour nurturing, hovering, responding, ever so necessary in their jobs as primary caregivers?

How about grumpy bosses who love to pick at what's wrong and rarely find the good?

A flash mob of employees singing, dancing and speaking truth to power might change things.

I could see flash mobs for moms who don't feel appreciated, for dads who need to know they are loved, for teachers who spend all day shaping and inspiring future generations, for maintenance workers who empty trash bins, clean toilets and fix leaky roofs.

What about flash mobs for the elderly who have been left alone, for the homeless who have nothing to turn to except, perhaps, a shopping cart loaded down with what's left of their lives or simply for lonely souls in general.

So if you're thinking there's nothing right with the world these days, you're wrong. Flash mobs are pretty darn right.

Whether you call them healing tonics, miraculous antidotes or incredible cure-alls, flash mobs are an amazing thing to watch unfold.

And the show "Mobbed"? Priceless.

2012 © Copyright Paula Damon. A resident of Southeast South Dakota, Paula Bosco Damon is a national award-winning columnist. Her writing has won first-place in competitions of the National Federation of Press Women, South Dakota Press Women and Iowa Press Women. In the 2009, 2010 and 2011 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contests, her columns have earned eight first-place awards. To contact Paula, email boscodamon.paula@gmail.com, follow her blog at my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on FaceBook.

SOUTH DAKOTA EDITORIAL ROUNDUP

The Associated Press
The Argus Leader, Aug. 13, 2012
Teacher evaluations shouldn't be a threat

It's no secret that it is difficult to measure the success of teachers, because they can inspire and mold students in so many ways.

They teach the mysteries of math, the intricacies of science and the complexities of reading and writing. Success or failure in those subject areas traditionally have been measured with standardized testing. But many teachers also instill a love of learning, guide students into future careers, build self-confidence, watch out for their well-being and share the concern that comes from a caring adult. Those things tend to be priceless, immeasurable.

In South Dakota, as in the rest of the states, our schools are going to attempt to rate teachers based on test scores and more. The leader of a work group coming up with a system for the state has told education leaders it is going to take time to judge teachers, the time of teachers and their administrators.

By the 2014-15 school year, South Dakota teachers will be judged as distinguished, proficient, basic or unsatisfactory. Ironically or not, those categories are similar in nature to how students have been judged under No Child Left Behind.

The group developing criteria is asking schools to provide annual formal and informal observations and a peer observation. The state is working on a way to train every school principal on how

to evaluate teachers using the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching.

The process will add time to the busy days of school administrators and teachers. Ideally, there will be more feedback between each school's top academic administrator and those in the classrooms. That sets up a great learning experience and a good way to improve teacher quality in cases where it is needed. Hopefully, it will add to the learning environment and not take precious time away.

But it also opens up the possibility that some administrators and teachers will do the minimal amount of work to meet the state requirements. We hope that is not the case.

Like it or not, times are changing and have continually changed in education. Looking for ways to improve teacher quality is a great goal. It shouldn't threaten anyone, and it should be viewed as an opportunity more than a mandate.

South Dakota generally has good schools and good teachers, but there always is room for improvement. There are chances to learn and grow, even for teachers.

Done well — even though judging teachers is difficult — the feedback given under the upcoming evaluations could inspire an educator to do an even better job of teaching the state's students and instilling in them the love of learning. That's the goal and the hope, after all. It's also what students deserve.

Watertown Public Opinion, Aug. 16, 2012

The reality of the death penalty

Tina Curl wants to see Donald Moeller die.

Actually, Curl wants to watch Moeller die.

Curl's daughter, Becky O'Connell, was killed in 1990 when she was 9 years old. O'Connell was abducted from a Sioux Falls convenience store, raped and murdered.

Moeller was convicted of the crime and sentenced to death.

Though no date has been set for Moeller's execution, Curl told a Sioux Falls media outlet she will be present when it does occur.

She "won't get any peace of mind" until Moeller is dead, "and I will be there to see it," Curl told the television station.

The United States is one of the few "first world" countries that still embraces capital punishment. As long as capital punishment is legal, it is difficult to argue Moeller does not deserve to be executed.

Kidnapping. Raping. Murdering. All three committed against an all-but defenseless 9-year-old.

But if we are going to execute our most reprehensible criminals, we should not allow myths to intrude upon reality. Two of those myths are that execution provides "peace of mind" and "closure."

It provides neither. The families of the victims of the 1995 Oklahoma City federal building bombing anticipated they would have peace and closure when convicted bomber Timothy

McVeigh was executed. Those feelings were even stronger, they said, after McVeigh's federal execution was delayed by a month.

But, one year after McVeigh's eventual execution, most family members reported they felt no peace, no closure nor any better than they did before the execution.

The problem the United States has with capital punishment is not our pre-biblical "eye for an eye" sense of justice. Rather, it is the misguided notion that executing a heinous criminal accomplishes more than simply the execution of a heinous criminal.

Studies have shown: — It costs more to execute a criminal than it does to imprison him for life;

— Executing a criminal does nothing to deter crime and;

— Execution does not — despite what they may say ahead of an execution — help the victims' families find peace or closure.

Despite what people in many other countries may say, executing the darkest, most sordid members of our criminal society is not inherently wrong. Doing it under false pretenses, though, is inherently wrong. If we are too meek to accept the facts of why we are executing someone (the "fact" being we can) then, perhaps, we should not be doing it.

Donald Moeller likely will die for the death of Becky O'Connell. But we would not honor our responsibility as a free people if we did not acknowledge the real reason for his death.

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