

## A half-empty feeling

I tend to be a half-glass full type of guy. At least I think I am.

I usually try to look at the bright side.

Since last Friday, after the massacre in Newtown, CT, I've been struggling to find a bit of brightness.

Just a sliver.

And there are a few points of light, scattered about here and there, enough to gather together to create a small glow.

President Obama's words at the vigil held in Newtown Sunday night, for example:

"If there's even one step we can take to save one child, or one parent, or one town from the grief that has visited Tucson, and Aurora and Oak Creek and Newtown and communities from Columbine to Blacksburg before that, then surely we have an obligation to try," the president told the auditorium.

"In the coming weeks, I'll use whatever power this office holds to engage my fellow citizens, from law enforcement to mental health professionals to parents and educators in an effort to prevent more tragedies like this," he said. "Because what choice do we have?"

The president's statements brought a bit of comfort, and a bit of sanity as our nation grasps with these crazy times.

There just aren't good words to talk about Newtown. It is a crime that literally defies imagination – it, in fact, flings imagination down and stomps it flat. No one reading this can imagine strolling into an elementary school and opening fire on a bunch of small children. You can't imagine even wanting to.

And since there are no "good words," I wish some people would remain silent.

Mike Huckabee, former Arkansas governor and GOP presidential candidate, was not helpful when he told Fox News the shooting happened because "we removed God from our schools."

Rush Limbaugh hardly provided any comfort when he claimed, on his radio show, that "...the Drive-By Media and the Democrats are attempting to politicize the issue to advance their own agenda. In this case, probably an assault on the Second Amendment again. I guarantee you that they are overturning everything they can in their quest to be able to blame this on Republicans. This, to them, is an opportunity."

This, and a host of other things that I've read this past week – so-called "solutions" offered by who I am sure are well-meaning people – leave me a bit pessimistic right now.

I think part of the problem is what happened last Friday is so grotesque that it defies understanding. I don't blame those who are currently calling for greater gun control right now. I also must admit I personally see no need for a civilian like me to own a gun designed, not for hunting, but for mass destruction.

So, naturally, there's been a reaction to anyone espousing a

belief that perhaps gun control is an issue that should be looked at. Gun control opponents are angry that "liberals" immediately started talking about gun control, but this seems like a natural instinct to me. It's not the best way to get good policy, mind you; hard cases make bad laws, and rules passed in the wake of tragedies tend to be over-specific, and under-careful about unintended consequences.

### BETWEEN THE LINES



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I, for example, instinctively do an eye-roll every time I read about someone who believes the solution is arming everyone from principals and teachers to janitors in our schools. In fact, it seems likely that legislation calling for such a move may be introduced during next year's legislative session in Pierre. It's a lousy policy to consider.

According to a news report this week, public schools in South Dakota shed 214 teaching jobs and 14 administrators last school year in the wake of a dramatic reduction in state aid. I wish state lawmakers would focus on trying to stem that problem, instead of trying to require the staff of our poorly funded schools to arm themselves.

Back to the issue at hand (notice how I've seemed to nearly stray off topic more than once? It's reflective of what's happening in our nation right now.)

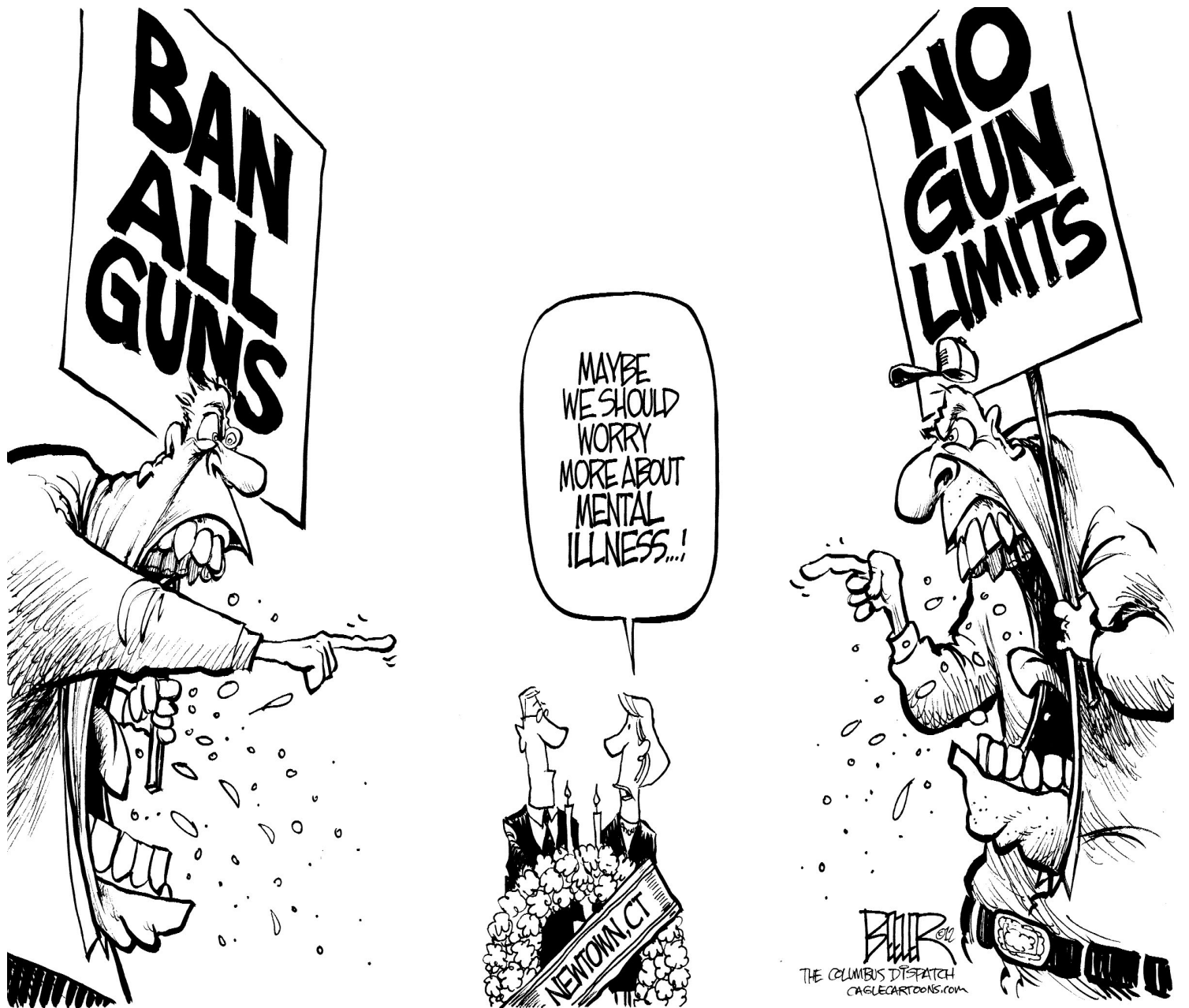
After Columbine, and Virginia Tech, and Tucson and Aurora – and now Newtown – I think it's good that a national dialogue has begun.

I mean, if 30 Vermillion children had been killed in a freakish landslide of a Missouri River bluff, I hope that we'd be talking about whether there might be some way to keep that from happening in the future.

I'm hopeful that the National Rifle Association, which will finally be making some sort of statement on Friday, can serve as an advocate for positive change. I'm not an NRA member, but I know people who are. I'm sure most NRA members are reasonable people. When the president talks about engaging fellow citizens, the NRA needs to be at the table.

But, my glass remains half-empty. Maybe a policy can be implemented which could stop something like Newtown from happening again. History shows that we won't implement that policy. And since nothing else is going to work, we are not going to pass a law that will stop these sorts of mass shootings.

We may pass a law, mind you. But whatever we do pass, we will have more of these evil happenings ahead of us.



## The letter behind our Christmas letter

This is not your run-of-the-mill Christmas letter. Among some major milestones, we are sharing unsung moments we normally would keep to ourselves – the day-to-day stuff our lives are made of...

Once again this past year, Brian gave Paula a refresher on how to put air in her car tires. Even so, she still stops at the only fueling station in town, where the attendant fills tires. Doing so saves her the hassle of kneeling on hard concrete in her professional business attire with the air hose in one hand, the tire gauge in the other, while trying to read [with her first-ever pair of bifocals] the amount of air pressure stamped on the tire, which is impossible to decipher with black printing on black tires.

In March 2012, our lakefront finally dried out after hemming us in by flood water from June 2011 through November of 2011, leaving behind a path of destruction. From a distance, the rising water appeared surreal, yet benign. However, we learned to never underestimate the power of standing water, including this litany...

Our 100-foot long lakefront, including boat dock, trees, perennial flowers, bushes and once lush green lawn were destroyed. Brian spent the better part of the summer rebuilding the dock. We joined with our neighbors in hiring a contractor to restore the lake bank with a river rock break-wall, and then grate and reseed the lawn area. It wasn't long before Brian and our 15-year-old granddaughter, Gracie, repurposed sand from the sandbag levee to create an expansive beach area along the shore.

Now unmoored from an epic flood, we rejoice in this silver lining, which Brian calls "taking lemons and making lemonade." In nearly 40 years of lake dwelling, our first-ever beach is giving us countless hours of entertainment watching boaters, wildlife, sunsets, and, yes, playing in the sand; although, Paula is still picking up litter left behind by inconsiderate boaters and ancient driftwood washed ashore by the high waters.

After a hot dry summer, when the temperature finally dropped below 100 in late September, Brian seized the day, acquired a building permit and started two of four new projects. He constructed a carport on the north side of the garage for his 1993 Honda Del Sol T-Top and nearly completed a deck on the high bank overlooking the lake. In spring 2013, he'll start work on a brick patio off the walk-out basement, above which

### MY STORY YOUR STORY



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he plans to build a three-season porch to replace the weathered sundeck and screen porch he constructed many years ago.

We'd be remiss by not mentioning that in the throes of Brian's weekend warrior-ness, Paula has reluctantly renewed her gopher's license. At any given time, she can be found going for slotted screwdrivers and Phillips screwdrivers, ratchet wrenches and plain wrenches, chalk lines and levels. And while she prides herself in knowing a little bit about tools, she often mistakes one for the other, increasing her gopher time exponentially.

As she approached her 60th birthday in November, Paula decided to grin and bear it. So, rather than belting out a primal scream or throwing a pity party, she encountered it gracefully by inviting friends and family over to eat cake and drink punch. Needless to say, her sweet tooth is still alive and well, as she has two new recipes to try in the New Year: gingerbread and eggnog tiramisu and cinnamon caramel swirl breakfast rolls. Yummy! Oh, and we mustn't forget that, for first time ever, the weather was so warm in December that Paula put up the outdoor Christmas decorations in Bermuda shorts and a t-shirt, which planted a permanent grin on her face.

This past year has been momentous in other ways, as well. We celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary. I call it sainthood. Brian calls it love. Either way, we decided to celebrate this accomplishment for the rest of our lives. In September, Brian fulfilled a lifelong dream of going back to college for an art degree. Even though his classmates use iPads to complete their schoolwork, he is relying on a standard PC and good old fashioned pen and paper. He earned all A's in his first semester. Go, Brian!

After spending 32 years at Mercy Medical of his 40-year career in social work, he decided to retire on Dec. 21, 2012. With three retirement parties and many, many well-wishes and expressions of gratitude from his coworkers and patients, Brian didn't expect the sea of emotions associated with letting go of a humble career of changing and, in some cases, saving lives. We are ever so proud of Brian of his dedication and diligence in sharing his gifts with others.

Glancing back with gratitude at 2012, we embrace the New Year with festive gladness over our innumerable joys: being grandparents to our three sweet and smart grandchildren and one on the way, for our three awesome children, for their incredible spouses and their richly blessed lives and for our heritage as Christians that promises, no matter what evil there is in the world, in the end, our divinely provident God will work out all things for the good.

Here's wishing you all good – always.

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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](mailto:boscodamon.paula@gmail.com), follow her blog at [my-story-your-story.blogspot.com](http://my-story-your-story.blogspot.com) and find her on Facebook.

### Guest Commentary:

## Christmas is a season of traditions

By Senator John Thune

Christmas has always been a season of tradition. From picking out the Christmas tree, to baking for the neighbors, nearly every family has their own customs and traditions around the holidays. Some of these traditions are community-wide celebrations that capture the true spirit of the season. That through the state you will find small and large towns coming together to enjoy the company of others and reflecting on the year that has passed.

For some, a trip to Pierre for a look at the Christmas trees that are decorated by businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government offices is an annual tradition. Others enjoy the nativities and Christmas pageants that local churches and community groups will host each year. Some enjoy the sounds of the season at school concerts and the South Dakota Acoustic Christmas in Sioux Falls, Yankton, Lead, and Rapid City. No matter the tradition, the season presents wonderful opportunities to enjoy the fellowship of friends and family.

Perhaps no tradition is more important than

celebrating the season of giving by remembering those who are less fortunate. I am always amazed by the generosity of South Dakotans, and I know that in difficult times those in need can count on others for support during the Christmas season. Not all South Dakotans have the means to make financial donations to those in need, but many South Dakotans will choose to donate their time and talents, offering a helpful hand to a neighbor in need, organizing food drives, and providing a warm meal and gifts to less-fortunate children.

We also think about those families who have loved ones serving in the military around the globe who will be apart this Christmas. The strength of the family members who celebrate traditions while praying for the safety of loved ones in harm's way reminds us all of how fortunate we are to be together this time of year.

As you continue to celebrate your Christmas traditions this season, Kimberley and I would like to wish all of those travelling this season safe journeys and a very Merry Christmas. May God continue to bless South Dakota and our great nation.

### Guest Commentary:

## Take time to help others this holiday

By Rep. Kristi Noem

It's hard to believe Christmas is already around the corner. While kids are more concerned with laying out cookies for Santa and carrots for the reindeer, parents are busy trying to get that last-minute gift for a friend or relative. So as stores fill with last-minute shoppers and Christmas tree farms begin to seem picked over, it's also a good time to remember the spirit of the holiday season.

Every Christmas morning, I ring a bell to signal the start of our Christmas morning celebration. Even if Cassidy, Kennedy and Booker are awake before the bell rings, they have to wait in anticipation until they hear the bell. It's traditions like this that make the holidays so special to me.

Bells, whether attached to a sleigh or an ornament, are a universal sound of the holidays. Across South Dakota, the Salvation Army has bell-ringers outside shopping and grocery stores to raise money for their Red Kettle Campaign. This year, money raised goes directly to those impacted by the destruction of Hurricane Sandy,

and I was glad to help raise money by ringing the bell in Brookings recently. I am so thankful that I have a home to return to, but many will be without this holiday season. I hope we all take the time to remember and offer a helping hand to those who may need a pick-me-up.

I'm so blessed to have the opportunity to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior with my family, but there are many South Dakotans who are apart from their family and friends this holiday season. I think of our brave men and women currently serving in our armed forces who spend every day on the job. Recently, I had the opportunity to write cards to our troops overseas and to thank them for their tireless commitment to defend the values our country holds so dear. I would encourage South Dakotans to take the time to do something this holiday season to share love with our courageous service men and women abroad.

From our family to yours, we wish you a very, merry (and hopefully white) Christmas and hope you have the opportunity to create lasting memories with friends and family.

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