



David Lias
Between The Lines

Texting while driving a poor mix

Kudos to District 17 Rep. Eldon Nygaard, D-Vermillion, for his introducing a bill – HB 1178 – in the South Dakota House that, if approved, would have made texting while driving a criminal offense.

We wish we could sing the praises of District 17's other House member, Rep. Jamie Boomgarden, a Republican from Chancellor. He voted against the legislation, citing problems with enforcement as a main reason for taking that action. The House of Representatives narrowly defeated HB1178 Wednesday, Feb. 17, with Boomgarden's help, after passing the House Transportation Committee.

HB1178 would make it a misdemeanor offense punishable by a \$20 fine to compose, read or send an electronic message while operating a motor vehicle.

The bill would not apply to voice calls or to dialing numbers on a mobile phone.

Texting while driving would be a primary offense under the bill, meaning law enforcement officers could pull someone over for doing it.

"This bill merely brings the attention of our driving public and our text messaging citizens to the fact that it's dangerous," said Nygaard, the bill's prime sponsor.

In his weekly column, published in this week's Plain Talk, Rep. Boomgarden defends his opposition to the bill by taking a wildly illogical leap.

He states that the bill failed on the House floor "due to the members again having concerns that enforcement would be a big issue as well as having government stepping in again and placing even more restrictions on people's lives. My two issues were related to imagining an officer at 41st and Minnesota Avenue in Sioux Falls observing all the cars at the intersection that have drivers on the phone. How in the world do you handle this or do you turn a blind eye? ...

"Secondly, is my concern that people when they receive a text will try to do the right thing either by ignoring it (unlikely) or they may pull to the side of the road and then abruptly pull out in traffic that is traveling at highway speed."

Setting up a scenario that is just plain silly is a poor way to defend opposition to this legislation. If an officer in Sioux Falls observed that the drivers of all the cars he could see were taking swigs out of bottles of Budweiser, we're fairly confident he wouldn't throw up his arms, mutter to himself, "there's no way to enforce this," and simply let every single driver continue an activity that likely has a strong chance of causing public harm.

That second observation – doing the right thing by pulling to the side of the road only to then pull out into traffic – is a head-scratcher, too. In Rep. Boomgarden's opinion, doing the right thing is just as dangerous as doing the "wrong" thing of texting while driving, so it's okay to allow the "wrong" activity to take place in South Dakota.

Never mind that motorists in our state pull over to the side of the road, stop for whatever reason – a flat tire, engine trouble, to quiet a screaming kid – and safely pull back onto the road again. We have heard no accounts that this activity is a major concern among law enforcement in South Dakota that should be outlawed. Unless, perhaps, those drivers are also texting at the time.

Forget scenarios are highly unlikely. Here's what very smart people, using something very accountable called scientific observation, have found.

Researchers at the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute discovered last summer that when the drivers texted, their collision risk was 23 times greater than when not texting.

According to a news report published in the New York Times last summer, the researchers also measured the time drivers took their eyes from the road to send or receive texts. In the moments before a crash or near crash, drivers typically spent nearly five seconds looking at their devices – enough time at typical highway speeds to cover more than the length of a football field.

Compared with other sources of driver distraction, "texting is in its own universe of risk," said Rich Hanowski, who oversaw the study at the institute.

That's why we were happy to hear that Rep. Nygaard plans to introduce his legislation again during next year's legislative session.

This week, MobileBurn.com, a Web site that focuses on mobile phones and related hardware, published a story that includes this as its lead statement: In 2008 almost 6,000 people were killed because of a driver losing focus, and that's why the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has asked the government to ban texting and driving.

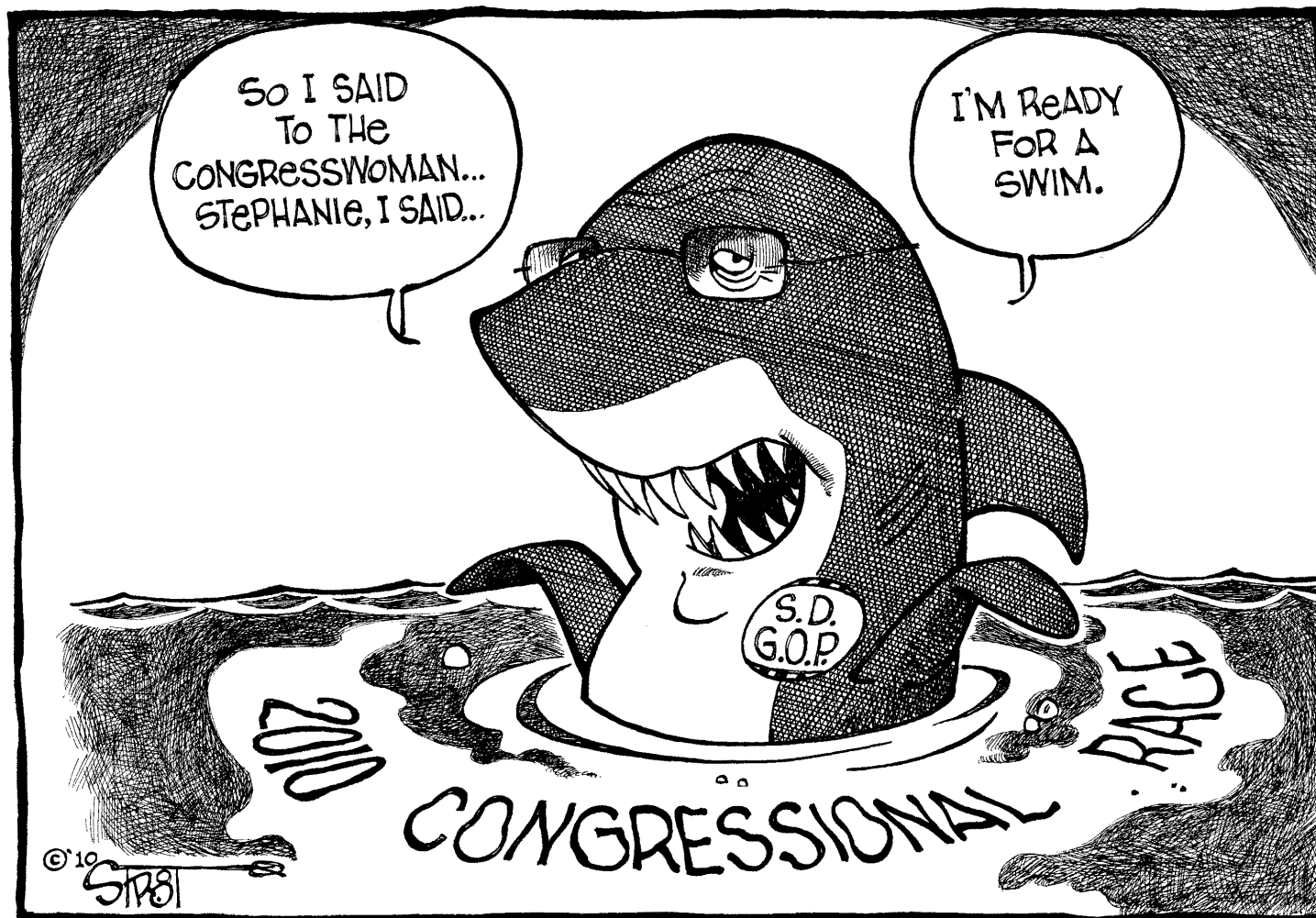
The new law would require law enforcement officers to issue tickets to drivers caught texting behind the wheel with at least a \$75 fine and "an unspecified action against their driving privileges," CNN reports.

According to the Governors Highway Safety Association, California, Connecticut, Washington DC, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, the Virgin Islands, and Washington ban handheld use while driving, and others, like Arkansas, ban the use of cell phones for drivers between the ages of 18 and 20 years old. Meanwhile, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Washington DC, Guam, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, and Washington already ban texting and driving.

It's time for South Dakota lawmakers to show a little common sense, and put something on the books that will help discourage texting and driving in South Dakota.

Tom Dingus, director of the Virginia Tech institute, one of the world's largest vehicle safety research organizations, said message of his organization's study is was clear.

"You should never do this," he said of texting while driving. "It should be illegal."



Sight of a chickadee brings cheer

Some say the first robin is a harbinger of spring; I contend it's a black-capped chickadee!

I saw one yesterday (a chickadee not a robin) and all of sudden it's vernal time again.

The snow may still be on the ground, but when the tiny bird – with the ebony beret – shows up, I know that winter is winding down, and the seasons will soon change.

I'm not normally an optimist; however, the song of that feathered flier leaves me with hope for a brighter tomorrow, and I don't mind the cold like I did before.

If that little bird can sing when the wind chills are down around zero, then why should I mope in the warm house? I should join him (or her) in announcing that spring is on the way and be glad that I survived another South Dakota winter.



Bob Karolevitz
Writer At Large

Maybe it's the Polish in me, but we opted for the four seasons rather than the sunny south. We can't blame anyone else, so when the black-capped chickadee makes its appearance, we know that we have made the right choice.

It's as though he (or she) welcomed us just as they do the coming of springtime which doesn't seem so far away.

The cheeriness of the chickadee is an emotion I need after several months of overcast, blustery weather. He (or she) brings a hopeful glimpse of the future – and,

believe me, that's what makes it easier for me.

I needed to know about the tiny bird which does so much for me, so I turned to the National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds and Roger Tory Peterson's Birds of Eastern and Central North America (Fifth Edition) which we had in our library.

I learned that the black-capped chickadee is a feathered acrobat, and that it is a tame, inquisitive bird that sometimes makes regular visits to feeders in the neighborhood – although I have never seen one amidst the

sparrows we usually attract. Until now, that is!

The sexes look alike, and that doesn't make a difference except to another chickadee. Eventually a boy and girl bird makes a cup-shaped nest with six to eight brown-speckled eggs to insure the continuation of the species. They usually pick a hole in a rotten tree or some other natural cavity. They have been known to nest in a bird box, too.

Their voice is a clearly enunciated chick-a-dee-dee-dee, and thus name. They also have a whistled fee-bee, with the first note higher than the second.

I would love to see a chickadee feeding upside down with its tiny feet clinging to a branch as it searches for insect eggs or larva, but I'll forgo that pleasure just to see it

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Life lessons in going for the gold

"Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." - Special Olympic Motto

Why is it that Olympic athletes teach us so much about life? I could write a book titled "All I really need to know I learned from watching the Olympic Games."

No matter which event is being televised, Olympic athletes offer so many pearls of wisdom, such golden advice that only many years of intense training, sacrifice, victory or failure could produce.

When 25-year-old Minnesota native Lindsay Vonn struck gold in the women's downhill, she noted with confidence resolve, "I'm just going to attack every day with no regrets and no fear."

This was after flying down the mountain at 65 mph on two thin long boards called skis. Wow!

From kindergarten on, we are told to believe in ourselves, an adage we strive to internalize. Prior to the Quarter Finals in the 1,000-meter race, Apollo Ohno, with a

MyStory YourStory



Paula Damon
Columnist

razor-sharp gleam in his eyes and the corners of his mouth curled into a smile, said, "I'm very confident in my preparations. I know what I have inside of me."

And the other night, I heard one athlete bolt, "No matter how insecure you are, go for it!"

These Olympians have the corner on conquering any fears or doubts that stand between them and the gold, silver or bronze medals they are pursuing.

Perhaps the most profound lesson this year came from the U.S. men's figure-skating gold-medal champion, Evan Lysacek. He had his chance to put down rival Evgeni Plushenko, who offered a valuable lesson on what not to do when you lose. Admittedly disappointed

in the silver medalist's behavior, Lysacek responded by pointing out that we all want to win and that we sometimes get emotional when we lose.

Even with all the mud-slinging from the Russian skater, Lysacek said he likes and admires the guy.

The lesson here is that, although Plushenko was questioning Lysacek's gold-medal standing because he did not have a quad in his program, Lysacek did not go there, but rather took the high road.

All of this made me wonder how many parents have required their youngsters to watch the Olympic Games for more than the sport.

Just think how much kids would learn in one Olympic broadcast compared to all

other sports broadcasts combined. Valuable lessons on how to win, how to lose, how not to give up, how to be strong and how to practice, practice and practice some more.

Most Olympians battle adversity of one kind or another. Whether they win or lose, they are champions because they faced their fears, they believed in themselves and they did not give up.

A resident of Southeast South Dakota, Paula Damon is a national award-winning columnist. Her columns have won first-place in National Federation of Press Women, South Dakota Press Women and Iowa Press Women Communications Contests. In the 2009 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contest, Paula's columns took three first-place awards. To contact Paula, email pauladamon@iwi.net, follow her blog at www.my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on Facebook.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Plain Talk encourages its readers to write letters to the editor, and it asks that a few simple guidelines be followed.

■ Please limit letters to 350 words or less.

■ Letters should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind.

■ In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the Plain Talk will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses.

■ Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.

Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail to: Letters, P.O. Box 357, Vermillion, SD 57069, or e-mail us at david.lias@plaintalk.net.

LETTERS

Are we even debating Hyperion anymore?

To the Editor: Do you get the feeling Hyperion's backers are struggling to get things straight?

A rural water system refused their service request. Citizen groups are suing to reverse the sloppy, weak air permit issued by South Dakota. SD Gov. Mike Rounds is promoting Hyperion for carbon sequestration experiments. That's almost funny. Anybody who understands this area's geology knows that injecting carbon into the ground won't work here. I'd say Gov. Rounds is looking for a gimmick to help Hyperion get moving, or maybe he's shopping for some federal

money for Hyperion.

We do know that Hyperion – if built – will pour millions of tons of carbon dioxide into the air every year. We know the refinery industry is shutting down plants left and right, is operating at less the capacity, and is fighting for dear life to remain relevant as the world shifts away from fossil fuels. So, why are we even debating this debate anymore? Why do we want to trade thousands of acres of the world's best farmland for a dirty oil refinery bringing noise, pollution and transient workers to our stable, clean rural area?

Can't we do better than Hyperion's dirty oil refinery?

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Rural Alcester/Hawarden*

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