

VIEWPOINTS

SD legislators miss the target

Guns were not to blame for the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School that killed 20 children and six adults.

That was the conclusion of National Rifle Association CEO Wayne LaPierre, who added, "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun."

Speaking a week after the deadly shootings in Newtown, CT, LaPierre added that future school shootings could only be prevented if schools have armed security guards, just as the Secret Service

BETWEEN THE LINES



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protects President Obama.

I was left a bit incredulous by that statement at the time. It's not that I don't want kids to be safe. I certainly do. I don't think schools brimming with armed guards is the answer, however.

It appears that the South Dakota House of Representatives thinks LaPierre's idea is right on target. Tuesday, it voted to approve HB 1087, which calls for implementing a "school sentinel" program for public schools across our state.

And why bother with placing professional marksmen or active law enforcement personnel in our schools?

Along with the myriad of duties our teachers must accomplish each day, they can serve as our sentinels, too. Good Lord.

This is how bad of an idea HB 1087 is. The only way supporters of the legislation in the SD House kept it alive is by repeating, time and again, that implementing the program will be a "local decision" made by the school boards of every school district.

But guess what? In its current form, this bill requires that the "local decision" that has been pawned off from legislators to school board members must be made behind closed doors.

In other words, the sentinel program, if implemented in a school, must be kept secret. You know – we can't let news like that slip. What if the bad guys find out?

"The bad guys will have no knowledge of any school that has taken advantage of being able to have a sentinel," said Rep. Charlie Hoffman, R-Eureka, on the House floor Tuesday.

There's just one problem. The good guys – parents,

taxpayers, the general public -- will be denied knowledge of whether or not their community's school buildings contains guns.

They may be pistols. Maybe even a shotgun or two. And where will the guns be kept? Will each teacher need to wear a pistol concealed on his or her person? How many armed teachers are enough? What about the janitor? Will he be wearing a Glock along with that big ring of keys on his belt? Where is the ammo kept?

I guess we'll never know. Does that sound like good policy to you?

Al Leber, who served many years as principal at Vermillion High School and today is superintendent at Dakota Valley, summed up our concerns very well. Shortly after the Newtown shootings, he told the Sioux City Journal that the proposal that eventually emerged as HB 1087 misses the underlying problem, and places an undue burden on teachers by expecting them to shoot and kill an armed intruder.

Leber said the focus should be on gun control and mental health issues.

This school sentinel idea makes about as much sense as calling a first grade teacher out of the bleachers during a Tanager football game to check and see if one of our players, who just got his bell rung, has suffered a concussion.

It's a silly notion, I know. That's why we have a health professional on the sidelines at sporting events, to help with injuries both serious and mild.

Our teachers devote at least four years in post-secondary education to honing their craft. Many of them go on to get advanced degrees so that even with limited resources, they can help our students excel.

Teachers are educators. They are not sentinels.

Making them sentinels does nothing to address 1) whether there is a potential in South Dakota to have a crazed shooter open fire on a school, and 2) the steps that need to be taken to stop such an incident from ever happening.

Do we need better gun control policies? Do we need better mental health screenings and services in our state? Are gun shows in South Dakota regulated adequately? Has there been any discussion of these or similar issues in Pierre with a goal toward making our schools safer?

The sentinel bill is really a non-solution if lawmakers won't include those other important issues in the debate about school safety. We encourage the SD Senate to shoot it down.

WHAT DO YOU CALL A DEDICATED PUBLIC SERVANT WHO MIGHT LOSE HIS LIFE IN THE LINE OF DUTY?



TEACHER...

SLIMZ 2012
CAGLE CARTOONS

More than ready for my closeup

By the time I read the "About Your Colonoscopy" pamphlet, I was well on my way to having one.

Put simply, a colonoscopy is a close-up of the rectum and large intestine. The doctor inserts a long narrow, flexible tube called an endoscope, which has bright light and video camera to capture the gastrointestinal tract.

Let's backtrack a bit. There is somewhat of prep for this exam. I was to follow a set of instructions in order for the endocrinologist to get a clear view.

On Tuesday, Jan. 22, two days before my colonoscopy, I could not eat past midnight. So, I played fast and loose with my last supper. Having two of everything, I ate like heck.

Wednesday, Jan. 23, was for fasting. Dreading this day since my last colonoscopy 10 years ago, I tried fooling myself into thinking of it as an assignment I wanted to ace. Glancing over the permissible list of clear liquids, I was mildly encouraged by the whopping 10 items on it: coffee, tea, soda pop, cranberry juice, grape juice, apple juice, broth, Jell-O (no red Jell-O), Popsicles and hard candy.

However, the longer I studied it, the more questions I had. Anxiously not wanting to mess up and, God forbid, start all over again, I nervously phoned the prep nurse.

"If I can't eat red Jell-O, may I have strawberry-banana Jell-O?" I asked, hoping the banana would dilute the strawberry, diminishing its redness.

"No way," the nurse replied. Darn. Pressing on, I asked, "May I have red Popsicles?"

"Not on your life." Suddenly, my assignment was looking more like a punishing sentence.

"Cranberry juice?" "Look," she said, abruptly breaking the news, "stay away from reds and purples, okay?"

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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Drink white grape juice or white cranberry juice. Avoid anything cherry, strawberry and grape," she quipped, ending the litany of no-no's.

So off I went to the grocery store, where I navigated the land of yellow Jell-O, yellow Gatorade, yellow broth and yellow soda pop. I really wanted to throw in some Popsicles for a little Wow, but they mainly consisted of evil red and

grape, so I passed. A firm believer that you can tell a lot about a person by what's in their grocery cart, I was feeling a little self-conscious about all the yellowy stuff in mine.

Filing into the checkout line, I began coveting what others were planning to have: Italian lasagna and garlic bread, steak and potatoes, subs with deli meats and cheeses. Drooling, I tried looking away, but couldn't. It was killing me.

Arriving home, I didn't waste time preparing my Jell-O appetizer, Jell-O entrée and Jell-O dessert. I had a veritable Jell-O assembly line going. For a little Whoopee, I blended lemon and lime Jell-O to make lemon-lime Jell-O casserole.

As long as we are on the subject, the hard candies really were a lifesaver. No pun intended.

Then, the clock struck 3 p.m. That was when my normal life as I knew it would end temporarily over the next 23 hours.

The instructions said to take four Dulcolax tablets, which was easy enough. No immediate side-effects.

At 5 p.m., I mixed 255 grams of Miralax

with 64 ounces of yellow Gatorade. Next, I drank an eight-ounce glass every five minutes until it was all gone. Since it took me nearly five minutes to drink each glass, I guzzled steadily for 40 minutes. Over the next one to two hours, I washed all of that down with eight glasses of water.

It didn't take long for the Miralax cocktail to do its thing. The entire goal was to clear the colon, and by 7:30 p.m., believe me, I was clear.

Upon rising at 7 a.m. on Thursday, Jan. 24, test day, I was feeling weak but ready to get it over with.

"Are you starving?" my husband asked in passing, his hands cupping a bowl of Cheerios.

I didn't answer him. I couldn't. With no real food since Tuesday, I was a tad irritable.

Of course, I'm starving, my head screamed. Do you think I'm stuffed?

The study of any one's plight down colonoscopy lane really is quite pathetic. A necessary evil, of sorts, it is impossible to underestimate the feelings of deprivation. My hunger? Rampant. My loss? Total.

All I could think of was post-test, when I would devour a freshly grilled hamburger on a warmed buttered bagel, homemade French fries and a nice big bowl of banana split ice cream.

Later that morning, when I was carted into the exam room and put under, nothing miraculous happened, until afterward, when the attending nurse's sweet soft whisper nudged me, "The test is over, Paula. Everything looked good."

Arousing heavily from anesthesia, I managed to utter, "No polyps?"

"No, dear, your test was perfect. Do you feel like some toast and juice?"

Not much of a toast eater, I exclaimed, "Do I ever!"

Legislative report

State departments make the case for more funding

By Tom Jones
District 17

After three weeks of having departments within the state government present their budget requests for the fiscal year 2014, it has become apparent they all have one thing in common: They all have requested more money than what the governor has proposed in his 2014 budget. This week we listened to the Department of Education, Tourism, Administration, Economic Development and Human Services.

One of the Department of Education's goals is to have all students entering the fourth grade to be proficient in reading. Students who do not read at this level when entering fourth grade are four times more likely to leave high school without a diploma than students who are proficient readers. Two factors that are the greatest problems in reading proficiency are: 1) Chronic absence and 2) summer reading/learning loss. The South Dakota Reads program showed improvements and had hundreds

of teachers trained, but the program was not funded for continuing years.

When high school students take the ACT and score 18 or less in math or 20 or below in English, they need remedial courses. Letters were sent from the DOE to all students and their parents if they did not score the minimums and offered remedial opportunities through the DOE as a cost of \$150. This would be paid by the student or their parents. If they wait until they enter college, the remedial cost is approximately \$867. This seems like a no-brainer to me. It follows the idea of, "You can pay me now or you can pay me later."

The DOE felt that the majority of the schools are doing well. Eighty-three percent of the schools are at proficiency or higher level. My hat is off to these schools.

The Bureau of Administration handles many areas. Their total budget request is almost \$38 million. State-owned vehicles (3,500 of them) were driven over 40 million miles this past year. When state

employees drive their own vehicles, they are paid 34 cents per mile. The question was asked, why 34 cents when the Federal rate is 56 cents? The obvious answer was, "South Dakota is solvent." The Bureau is also asking for a 2 percent rate for maintenance and repairs.

This is in reference to the upkeep of the state's buildings. It is better to annually maintain and repair than to incur a huge cost to replace a building.

An item that came under scrutiny within the Economic Development budget was the South Dakota WINs program. Last year Gov. Daugaard established this fund with \$5 million from the general fund. The goal was to recruit 1,000 new workers from outside of South Dakota for hard to fill jobs. The cost of the recruitment of each employee is split 50/50 between state government and the hiring company. In the first six months of the three-year program, SD WINs has spent \$500,000 tax dollars to recruit and place 55 employees with 10 South Dakota companies. Taxpayers pay the

Wisconsin-based recruiting company (Manpower) a \$49,000 per month fee. In these six months, we have spent an estimated \$8,000 per job from state monies and the hiring company has to match this amount. If this program is to continue, it is only right to do a cost/benefit analysis and let those results determine its future.

As our number-one industry in South Dakota, the Department of Agriculture presented their requested budget for 2014. Their total request was for a little over \$42 million. Included with what we would call typical agricultural interests within this department are: Fires, State Fair, Brand Board and veterinary medicine. They have a couple of buildings in their plans for the upcoming year. One is to construct office space on land they have acquired from the Game, Fish & Parks Department located in Rapid City. One of the main purposes is for the Fire crews that are needed in the Black Hills and the Western Plains. The other building is to replace a badly deteriorated

building on the State Fair campus in Huron. Perhaps, if we had initiated the 2 percent maintenance and repair fund years ago, we would not have this huge expense today.

The last department we heard from this week was the Bureau of Human Services; mainly health insurance for the state employees. They are requesting a 14 percent increase for 2014. They offer to the state employees three options of deductibles: \$500, \$1,000 and \$1,800. After many, many questions and answers, we asked them to come back later in the session so we could finish this discussion and deal with the rest of their budget requests.

During the senate session this week, some of the main bills that we acted on, we, in general, agreed with. We passed SB52 which allows for video lottery machines to accept one-cent denomination bets. This bill passed 30-5. SB5, 4 and 3 dealt with postsecondary education regarding policy goals, performance and accountability. I did serve on this committee this

summer. SB5 passed 28-6. SB4 and SB3 passed unanimously. SB70 was, in my opinion, the most significant piece of legislation enacted in some time. It rearranges our prison system a great deal. Eighty percent of our prisoners today are because of alcohol and drug problems. This bill will (if passed by the house and signed by the governor) establish more drug and alcohol courts, deal with 24/7 release avenues, daily check-ins, etc. If we do not do something with our criminal court system we will have to spend \$225 million in the next 10 years to build and operate two more prisons to accommodate the additional inmates we acquire. This bill passed 31-2, with two absent.

Next week we hear higher education's budget request. It should be interesting. I anticipate that there will be many in attendance.

If you would like to contact me, do it at sen.jones@state.sd.us. Please sign your name and include where you live.

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