

Resolve to buckle up

"Every operator and front seat passenger of a passenger vehicle operated on a public highway in this state shall wear a properly adjusted and fastened safety seat belt system, required to be installed in the passenger vehicle when manufactured pursuant to Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard Number 208 (49 C.F.R. 571.208) in effect January 1, 1989, at all times when the vehicle is in forward motion. The driver of the passenger vehicle shall secure or cause to be secured a properly adjusted and fastened safety seat belt system on any passenger in the front seat who is at least five years of age but younger than eighteen years of age."

BETWEEN THE LINES



DAVID LIAS
david.lias@plaintalk.net

That's the exact wording of South Dakota Codified Law 32-38, written in a style that makes it fit perfectly in a book filled with laws and regulations.

In plain English, the law states that if you're driving or are a passenger in a moving motor vehicle, you shall wear a safety belt.

As we begin a new year, we hope motorists will resolve to follow safe practices and obey state law and always buckle up while driving or when a passenger in a car or truck.

We don't need another day like Dec. 18, when three people lost their lives in three separate traffic accidents on an icy stretch of Interstate 29 near Vermillion. A woman from Akron, IA, and a woman from Emery were killed when their automobiles were involved in accidents. Neither woman was wearing a seat belt; both were thrown from their vehicles.

The third fatality, a Garretson man, was a passenger in a truck that went out of control and rolled on the interstate. Initial reports of the accident didn't state whether he was using a seat belt.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, seat belts are the most effective form of protection in a crash. Yet, millions of Americans don't always buckle up. The biggest offenders are:

- Teenagers
- Males
- Truck drivers
- Pickup truck drivers

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has identified some reasons why

people do – and don't – wear seat belts. According to its Unconscious Motivators and Situational Safety Belt Use report, most people always wear seat belts. However, when people don't wear seat belts, they are generally in situations where they feel safe and ignore the risks.

The report recommends a positive approach to encouraging everyone to wear a seat belt. Some suggestions include:

- Wearing a seat belt helps you feel in control.
- Wearing a seat belt because other people care about you and want you to be safe.
- Modeling the behavior you expect of your children.
- Wearing a seat belt to be a good passenger.
- Asking your friends to wear their seat belts.

We realize this list sounds like a nice collection of feel-good platitudes, but consider this – since South Dakota enacted its seat belt law, more and more people in our fine state have made bucking up a habit.

Prior to 1994, South Dakota had one of the lowest safety belt usage rates in the United States, with only 26 percent of front seat passengers choosing to buckle up.

Since the passage of the safety belt law, seat belt usage has been steadily increasing. A statewide survey conducted in 1998 showed the usage rate at 43 percent statewide. A recent observational survey in 2007 indicated a safety belt use rate of 73 percent.

In 2010, the rate was observed to be 74.5 percent, the highest rate ever achieved in South Dakota surveys. In 2011, seat belt usage ticked down a notch, to 73.4 percent in the statewide survey.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for people age 5-34. Adult seat belt use is the single most effective way to save lives and reduce injuries in crashes. The percentage of adults who always wear seat belts increased from 80 percent to 85 percent between 2002 and 2008 – that's a national statistic that shows South Dakotans to be lagging behind the national trend when it comes to buckling up. Part of that may be because adults who live in rural areas are 10 percent less likely to wear seat belts than adults who live in urban and suburban areas.

We realize laws are only effective if they are followed. We also realize that some motorists and passengers may consistently choose to not follow the law when in a motor vehicle.

We hope 2013 is the year those people change their minds, and begin to use seat belts.

VIEWPOINTS



Some days, there's not much to write about

Some days, there's not much to write about, unless you consider this morning's frost. Delicate ice crystals on cobwebs laced more intricately than tatting. Dainty strokes of nature's artwork carefully engineered by a perfect balance between air temperature and moisture painted on canvases of branches and berries, windows and wind chimes.

Some days, there's not much to say, unless you care to know the squirrels are eating all the bird food I set out for the cardinals, blue jays and chickadees. It's too late now. Word's out all over the squirrel community, "Buffet at the Damon's." Those poor birds hardly have a chance at a decent meal.

Some days, there's not much to talk about, unless you want to know what I heard at the mall the other day. The miniature holiday train with its horn sounding "All aboard, all aboard!" was making its rounds up and down the broad aisles of the vast indoor shopping center.

Spotting the bright red, green, blue and yellow cars, a young girl, age eight or nine, promptly pointed and said with a shrill, "Now that's what I want to ride!"

The adult at her side quickly quipped condescendingly, "No, you don't. You're too big for that."

"Not so," the young one whined. "Not so!" she insisted.

Shuttering at the thought of squelching a child's playful spirit, I sided with the girl but kept that to myself.

Some days, there's not much to talk about, unless you care to go round and

round over the prolific use of the "F" word in today's vernacular.

It's become so commonplace, you might as well call it the "Oh, darn!" of the twenty-first century.

A friend shared with me that in her school district, one elementary student's excessive use of that expletive prompted the teacher to call the child's parents. After the teacher explained the problem, the parent replied, "What's wrong with that? We use it all the time at home."

Stories like that make me worry about how adults speak to children. Like at the store, when I overheard a grown-up say nastily to a misbehaving child, "I'll step on you!"

Some days, there's not much happening, unless you consider Shelly's Christmas surprise. I don't mind telling you that no sooner had she plopped down beside me at Christmas Eve service, did she start in about her adult son's refusal to attend church with her that evening.

"For Pete's sake, it's Christmas," she griped, shaking her head in exasperation. "It's once a year. How much easier does it get than that?"

Not sure how to console her, I simply said, "Well, I'm glad you're here."

"I can't blame him," Shelly admitted. "I

only started back two years ago and look how old I am. I should give him a break."

Just minutes before the service began, the unbelievable happened. A young man in his late twenties came up behind Shelly, with gusto squeezed her shoulders and kissed her on the cheek.

"Merry Christmas, Mom," he said in a loud whisper, his honeyed face beaming.

Shelly whipped around in her seat, slapped her son's arm with her worship folder and then proceeded to reprimand him with Christmas joy, "Why, you stinker!"

She then stood to embrace her boy, repeating, "You little stinker," while patting him on the back.

All the while, I could tell Shelly was content by the way her eyes lit up and how the corners of her mouth curled into the sweetest smile you've ever seen. That night, a priceless Christmas gift came walking right in on the shoulders of a son's love for his mother. Content indeed.

Some days, there's just not much to write about.

Not so. Not so.

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

Rapid City Journal: Dec. 28, 2012

Let tribes manage own lands

Just in time for Christmas — and Christmas bills — Native Americans began receiving payments of up to \$1,000 as part of the landmark Cobell settlement for tribal trust lands. In addition, tribes will soon receive more than \$430 million to buy back tribal land with "fractured ownership."

The payments from the settlement are compensation from tribal lands held in trust by the federal government, which mismanaged the accounts. The settlement will pay out \$1.5 billion to 350,000 individual beneficiaries and \$1.9 billion to purchase trust land and create a college scholarship fund for Native Americans.

Pine Ridge reservation stands to gain the most from the buy-back program. The reservation has almost 1.2 million acres of trust land allotments with multiple owners. About \$126 million will be available to buy individual interests in those

tracts, which will be consolidated and ownership transferred to the tribe.

By consolidating the fractured trust lands, the tribes will be able to approve leases on the land or develop it with housing, other infrastructure or economic development projects. Too often, fractured land ownership has stymied economic development on reservations, many of which are among the poorest areas in the nation.

The Cobell settlement is named for the originator of the class action lawsuit, Elouise Cobell, a member of the Blackfeet tribe and who died last year before the settlement was disbursed.

The federal government has a history of mismanaging Native American interests, including the trust lands that the Bureau of Indian Affairs was supposed to manage to benefit tribes and individual land owners.

Consolidating the fractured trust lands and giving ownership to the tribes is an important step toward self-determination and, hopefully, some measure of economic

independence. Let the tribes manage their own lands that the federal government did such a poor job of doing on the tribes' behalf.

Argus Leader, Sioux Falls: Dec. 25, 2012

Help needed to teach English skills

An effort to get funding for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) programs in some South Dakota communities seems to be back on track this session.

Rep. Peggy Gibson, D-Huron, introduced a bill last session to try to raise the per-student allocation 20 percent to provide funding to school districts struggling to meet the need. The bill passed the House Education Committee but then died.

The idea now has been embraced by some Republican lawmakers and is expected to be back on the docket in January. It's unfortunate that this seems to be shaping up as a partisan issue now, but movement on getting help to the school districts in need is important.

The number of LEP students is growing in places such as Aberdeen, Huron and

Brookings as well as in Sioux Falls. Some of the growth in numbers is because of an influx of workers for manufacturing plants in those communities.

Schools need resources to help these young learners become proficient. It might not be wise to try to work the extra money through the funding formula, but that's at least one idea being examined. There probably are others to be considered as well.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard's senior adviser Tony Venhuizen agreed that funding for LEP students is "a timely issue," and that bodes well for the administration's assistance in getting something going.

This is an important issue, and lawmakers are right to work on a funding solution during the upcoming legislative session.

Daily Republic, Mitchell: Dec. 27, 2012

Make speeding a points-related offense

Dangerous driving seems to be on the minds of many as the state Legislature prepares to convene for the 2013 session.

In recent weeks, many have

been discussing the practice of texting while driving. We know that several cities have banned that practice, and Mitchell was at least considering it. For now, plans for a ban in Mitchell have been tabled while members of the City Council await news from the Legislature, where the issue is likely to be debated.

Now we hear that a Sioux Falls lawmaker, Rep. Steve Hickey, will likely introduce legislation to count points against drivers' records when they are caught speeding in South Dakota. A similar proposal came up last year in the Legislature but didn't make it out of the House of Representatives.

At present, traffic offenders accumulate points for various offenses, such as running a stop sign. Once those points reach a certain plateau, drivers can face a suspended license.

Just one problem: Speeding isn't one of the violations that accumulates points. In fact, among 42 states with point systems for drivers, South Dakota is the only one in which speeding is not a

points-related offense.

Think of the lunacy behind South Dakota's current system: A driver who gets cited for failure to yield or improper passing is at risk of accumulating points and inching closer to license suspension, while a driver who routinely gets caught at speeds of 80, 90 or maybe even 100 mph does not face the same scrutiny.

We suppose it's true that speeding drivers can be charged with reckless driving, and therefore accumulate those dreaded points. But the truth is they also might not be so charged, and there are many examples — some famous — to prove it.

So those who can afford the fines can keep speeding all they want, all the while endangering the lives of others on South Dakota's highways.

We wish Hickey luck with his legislation, and hope he follows through on his plans. We are sure his bill won't be popular with all of his colleagues, many of whom refuse to truly address some of the safety issues that plague our state's highways.

Vermillion

Since 1884 • Official County, City and School District Newspaper

201 W. Cherry, Vermillion, SD 57069 • Publication No. USPS 657-720

Publisher: Gary Wood • Editor: David Lias

PLAIN TALK

Published weekly by YANKTON MEDIA, Inc. • Periodicals postage paid at Vermillion, SD 57069.

Subscription rates for the *Plain Talk* by mail are \$27.56 a year in the city of Vermillion. Subscriptions in Clay, Turner, Union and Yankton counties are \$41.34 per year. Elsewhere in South Dakota, subscriptions are \$44.52, and out-of-state subscriptions are \$42.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Plain Talk, 201 West Cherry Street, Vermillion, SD 57069.

Vermillion Plain Talk Staff

News Staff: Travis Gulbrandson. **Advertising Director:** Michele Schievelbein. **Advertising Sales Rep:** Carol Hohenhaner. **Composing Staff:** Kathy Larson, Rob Buckingham & Sally Whiting. **Reception Office Manager:** Brett Beyeler. **Distribution & Circulation Manager:** David Jeffcoat.