

VIEWPOINTS

New law being ignored – so far

We've all read them. Dumb laws that either are still on the books or have been repealed because they don't make sense. They're good for humorous filler material in newspapers, and they give Jay Leno something to joke about.

For example, in North Carolina, "it is illegal to hold more than two sessions of bingo per week, and those sessions may not exceed 5 hours each session." In Nebraska, "It is not legal for a tavern owner to serve beer unless a nice kettle of soup is also brewing."

July has arrived. Along with celebrating our independence, the arrival of this month is a time to take stock of all the new laws passed by the South Dakota Legislature earlier this year. Most of them took effect July 1.

Except for HB1087, which allows local school boards in South Dakota to arm public school teachers, should they wish, all in the name of keeping kids safe. This law took effect last March.

South Dakotans likely may one day look at this measure as something that should be tossed into the "dumb law" file.

This bill caused quite a stir in Pierre last January, with supporters claiming it was suddenly needed here in South Dakota after the Sandy Hook shootings last December. Opponents (including me) argued that there are much better ways to improve school safety than arming teachers.

The proponents won. Sort of. The bill passed and was signed into law by the governor. South Dakota became one of seven states to enact laws permitting teachers or administrators to carry guns in schools. Those laws took effect last week here in Kansas, and in Tennessee, so those two states along with South Dakota have school sentinel measures in place.

I don't know what's happening in Kansas and Tennessee, but there's been no mad rush by public school districts in South Dakota to shop for guns and ammo along with computers and textbooks for the upcoming school year.

Not a single school district in South Dakota has taken advantage of HB1087. That may not mean much – West River school district representatives, noting that schools in the more sparsely populated areas of our state are flung far and wide, and in some cases are far from local law enforcement, seemed particularly gung-ho about seeing this bill passed.

We suspect, however, that this new law, while giving many the feel-good illusion of school security, will likely not see the light of day over time. We predict that it will be scarcely, if ever, put into effect by public school boards in our state.

One factor that may discourage school districts is the potential for increased insurance costs. Or, perhaps, difficulty in securing the desired insurance coverage. According to a recent New York Times report, EMC Insurance Companies, the liability insurance provider for about 90 percent of Kansas school districts, has sent a letter to its agents saying that schools permitting employees to carry concealed handguns would be declined coverage.

Firearm training rules for teachers in South Dakota have not yet been approved, delaying serious talks between districts and their underwriters. "Because it's not something the schools are considering, the issue really hasn't become full blown yet," said Wade Pogany, the executive director of the Associated School Boards of South Dakota. "I think it will eventually."

The Vermillion School Board briefly discussed this legislation months ago, while it was being bantered about in Pierre. They weren't exactly enthusiastic about this measure, as I recall, but withheld any strong criticism of the law while more or less stating they didn't really feel a need for implementing it here.

The board was way ahead of state lawmakers immediately after Sandy Hook. It took steps to review and improve the safety of our school buildings in Vermillion. Interior locks have been added to classroom doors. The front doors at the two elementary schools and the middle school have been outfitted with cameras and a locking system.

Also adding to the security of schools in Vermillion is the presence of a sheriff's deputy who serves as the school district's resource officer.

The Vermillion School District used good judgment, and, some may even say, common sense in addressing safety issues after Sandy Hook. My hope is a similar wave of intelligent policy making will waft through the halls of the state Capitol building next legislative session.

Lawmakers concerned with school safety would do a much better job serving their constituents by passing legislation that would help all school districts implement building security improvements.

Nearly all school districts, I bet, would take advantage of such assistance, while avoiding the "help," controversy, and added insurance costs the Legislature provided with the school sentinel law.

BETWEEN THE LINES



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Adjust clocks when herding cats

Have you ever wondered about people who don't show up for their flights at airports?

I have. "Paging Baltimore passenger José Aldrich, please report to Gate F-6." My first thought? Who is this José guy and how in the world could he be late for his flight?

"Justin Barker, report to Gate D-1," a Delta airline gatekeeper announced robotically. "We are preparing for departure."

Tell me, what could be more important to Mr. Barker than not cancelling his reservation to prevent his name from blaring over the intercom?

When I'm traveling by air, I always worry about missing my flights. Even though I never have, I arrive way early anyway.

"Paging Charles Connor, please report to Gate C5 for Delta Flight 1411, which is departing in one minute."

My heart sinks, fearing that if Mr. Connor doesn't appear at Gate C5 in a New York minute, he's not going to wherever Flight 1411 is headed.

Actually, this wasn't his first warning. After several calls for Mr. Connor, I wondered if his mother, Mrs. Connor, had the same problem reeling him in from outside on summer nights when he was a scrappy little kid.

All of those slackers who fail to report at their departure gates or can be seen dashing toward security

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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for our daughter's wedding in July 2000. That's when I took the desperate measure of turning our clocks and watches ahead one hour just so we wouldn't miss our flight out of Omaha.

Sounds bizarre, but I had to do it, since getting my family headed in the same direction at the same time can be a bit like herding cats.

My plan worked. They didn't catch on until we arrived at Eppley Airfield when those darn hard-to-miss airport terminal clocks gave it away.

Because I'm always so early for my flights, I have a lot of spare time to overhear conversations among other travelers.

One such exchange at the Minneapolis airport last July was between a father and son who were seated behind me at my gate.

Their talk, which was more like a lecture, went like this...

"Do know what state Minneapolis is in?" the father quizzed the young man.

No verbal response from the son, although he may have shirked, but I didn't turn around to see.

"Minnesota!" stressed the father condescendingly, while answering his own question.

"I don't need to know where Minneapolis is, Dad!" the son dismissed his father's sense of urgency.

"So, just because you're out of school now doesn't mean you don't have to know things," Dad grilled sarcastically.

I pictured the father's red face and his animated body language as he launched his emotionally charged verbal attacks toward the young man, whose attitude, goals and overall lack of gusto was under siege.

"How'd you do on the test?" "I haven't taken it yet," pattered the son nonchalantly.

That was the end of the conversation. I didn't hear anything more from those two.

Not sure if they left the gate or ended their conversation, but I felt a strange sort of sadness for both of them. I still wonder if the boy ever took his test.

I felt equally sorry for two lovebirds who sat next to me on a Southwest Airlines flight to Omaha from my connection in Las Vegas.

To be continued next week ...

Teamwork necessary for government to function

By Paul Young

President, South Dakota Municipal League

For any organization to be successful, teamwork must be a core commodity. For a municipality, teamwork is absolutely essential. We all know and appreciate the teamwork between the various departments, the teamwork between elected officials and city staff, and the teamwork between a mayor and council. But from an elected official's standpoint, I would like to single out some unsung players in this whole teamwork scheme.

Without these unsung players, municipal government would have a hard time functioning at all. The funny thing about it is that every community has these unsung players and they are different in every community.

These unsung players are the employers in your communities that allow their employees to serve the community as elected officials. They are willing to share their human resource with the community as a whole, knowing that there will be additional demands placed upon the employees' time and talent.

By allowing their employees to serve their community as elected officials, they not only allow their community to operate today but they allow the vision and goal to be set for tomorrow.

Every community depends upon people willing to serve in an elected capacity, willing to do the work necessary in the decision making process that shapes and molds the community. And

for everyone willing to serve, there must be someone willing to allow that person to serve.

So, you can see that the teamwork necessary for municipal government to function properly extends beyond the walls of city hall and includes many others outside of government proper. But whether realized or not they are showing that they care what kind of community they have and want by allowing their employee to be in a decision making position in their municipal government.

We could not do it without the flexibility and willingness of these employers to allow their employees to serve their community as an elected official.

In my 17 years as an elected official, I have been blessed with several employers who have been willing to allow me to serve my community and state. I am humbled and honored by their sacrifice. So here is a big shout-out to all the unsung players/employers across this great state of South Dakota. You not only provide us with great jobs but you also allow us the opportunity to serve the greater community as well. Your generosity does not go unnoticed. Thank you!

The South Dakota Municipal League was organized in 1934 as a nonpartisan, nonprofit association of incorporated municipalities in South Dakota. The League's mission is the cooperative improvement of municipal government in South Dakota.

PLAIN TALK POLL RESULTS

Do you agree with the Supreme Court's decision on the Defense of Marriage Acts?

Yes 37
No 24
Undecided 4

Total Votes 65

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