

Don't play the blame game

There's a lot of finger pointing going on right now.

It began nearly right from the start, when it became apparent that the only way to save homes in Pierre, Fort Pierre, Dakota Dunes and other points along the Missouri River was to stack sandbags and build dikes.

And hope. And pray. When the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced last Friday that water releases from Oahe would have to be increased, no doubt many people who have been growing skeptical of the management of the river system grew even more wary.

It didn't help when the Corps had to announce Tuesday that flows from Gavins Point Dam near Yankton would soon be increased from 150,000 cfs to 160,000 cfs, sending more water toward Clay County, Jefferson, Dakota Dunes and Sioux City, IA.

There is no doubt a lot of anger building among many South Dakotans. We can understand that, especially if they have had to work feverishly to try to protect their homes. We know some homeowners have lost that battle, and the feeling of loss can only grate at one's raw emotions even more.

It's easy to blame the Corps. Or Mother Nature. Or both.

It's not as easy to look at our collective actions over the years, and how they may have contributed to the problems we are now experiencing.

That's why we hope we can reach a point where everyone can collectively take a deep breath and, in earnest, examine what is happening to the Missouri River right now.

And more importantly, determine why it is happening.

John Cooper, the retired secretary of the state Game, Fish and Parks Department and an adviser to Gov. Dennis Daugaard on Missouri River issues, quickly can think of several things the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should study.

The corps' use of weather data and the movement of information through the corps bureaucracy both need scrutiny and would be good places to start, Cooper told the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

"Do we know enough about how water runs off the high country and off our own prairies to know how that equates to what happens in reservoirs?" he asked.

Also, the corps' runoff projections skyrocketed throughout the spring, from 37.8 million acre feet in April to 44 million acre feet in May to 52.5 million acre feet in June. For perspective, the highest previous runoff ever was in 1997, 49 million acre feet.

All of that data has many people wondering if the Corps got caught with its waders down.

Eric Stasch, the corps' engineers program manager at Oahe Dam, has said that his agency had a plan in place to

deal with the runoff this year, but it was undone by torrential rains across the Missouri River's headwater drainage in May.

But Cooper points to the fact South Dakota received only a week's warning before the corps dramatically stepped up water releases, and he questions whether the corps adequately accounted for the effect of record runoff.

"What was the corps thinking when that projection line was trending upward?" Cooper said. "I would have hollered an alarm. I would have said something to somebody."

A thorough study may determine that the Corps could have done a better job. It may also exonerate the Corps, and note that the one-two punch of record snowpack and heavy spring rains was just too much for our system of dams and reservoirs to handle.

There are other factors that may have contributed to this year's flooding.

The Missouri basin states have lost millions of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres in the past five years. Those CRP lands were valuable because they either slowed or halted runoff into streams and rivers. Has that exacerbated the problem?

What about the navigation channel south of Ponca, NE? Has it worsened the flooding along the lower Missouri? Has the channel's pile dikes, revetments, and chevrons, which reduces the lower Missouri's carrying capacity, made it impossible for the river to deal with high flows discharged by Gavin's Point Dam?

What about the silt build-up in the river here in South Dakota because of the dams? Has that added to our woes?

Could the navigation channel south of Sioux City be a source of what's ailing the river? Nearly a quarter of the total storage space in the mainstem reservoirs is set aside to ensure a nine-foot depth in the lower Missouri during the navigation season from mid-March to mid-November. What if the Corps had not been required to store water for the navigation channel, and instead would have had more storage space available in reservoirs for the freakish amount of precipitation received (and still falling) in the Missouri River basin?

There are a lot of questions that need to be answered. It's time to find those answers. Playing the blame game may make us feel a bit better temporarily, but will solve nothing.

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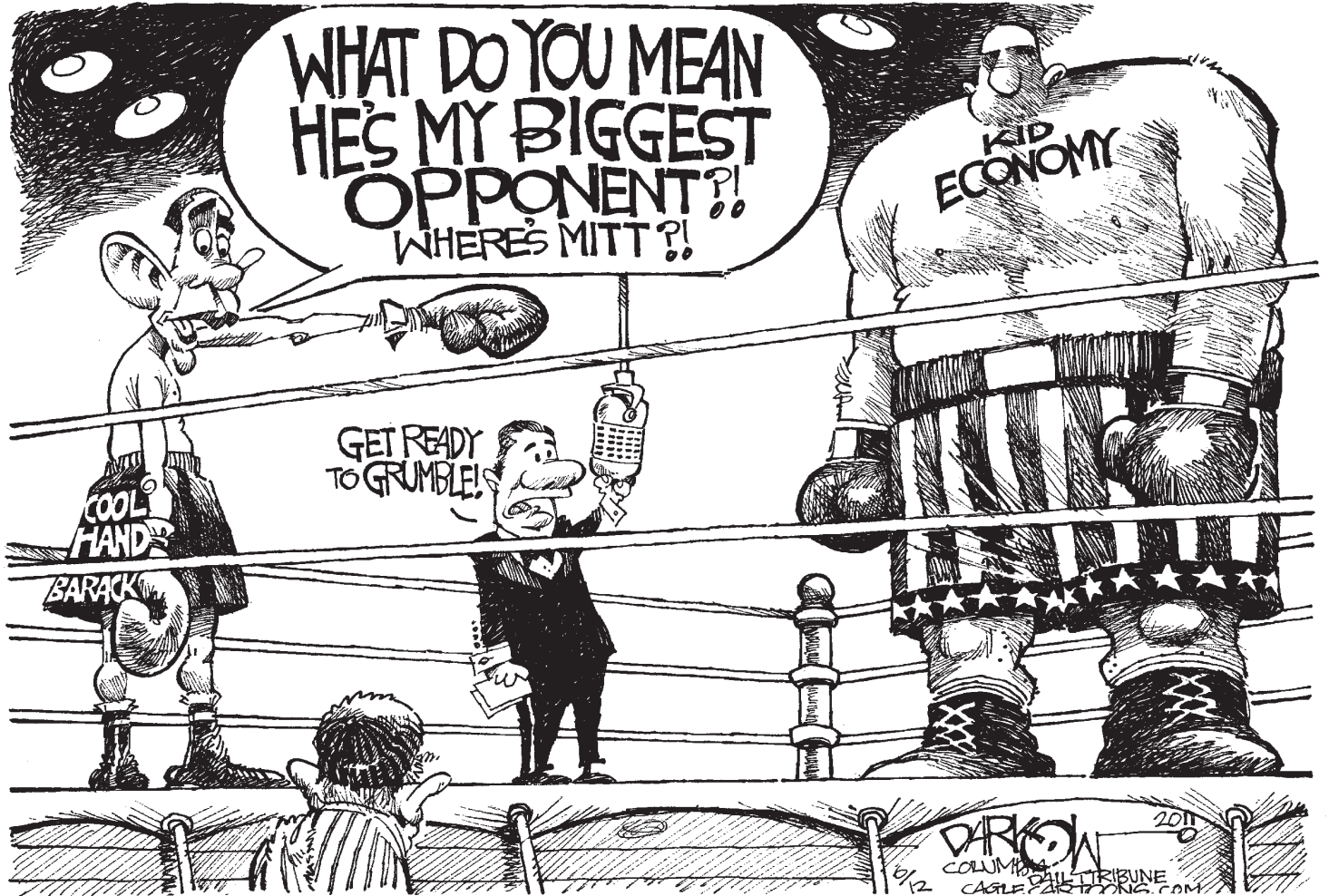
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This is between father and daughter

The young girl standing next to me in the card aisle couldn't be more than 8, maybe 9 years old. Her strawberry blonde hair is braided in pigtails and swept back from her forehead, probably a tidy look her mother prefers.

She's all alone, and I'm wondering how she got here. Did she walk to the store by herself? No, not likely. Did her mother drop her off? Maybe.

Our paths collide in this ocean of cards and envelopes for the sole purpose of picking out just the right one for Father's Day.

I'm paddling through the "To My Loving Husband" section, while she's wading in the "Hey, Dad" area.

It seems strange to have someone shorter than I am with whom to sojourn where usually adults, mainly women, flip through cards alongside of me.

For a time in a somewhat synchronous fashion, she and I navigate the greetings with precision, as though swimming laps, raising our hands, selecting cards, one after another, carefully reading and then placing them back into the endless pool of "No, not that one."

Our arms tire, but we don't stop in our pursuit of the perfect card.

I'm trying not to gawk at what appears to be a special moment in the young girl's life. In fact, I'd really like to sit back and simply observe this blessed process, maybe even take some notes.

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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with friends or swimming at the pool. Instead, she continues sorting through "Dad, Today Is All About You" and "You're the Best Dad in the World."

Five, ten, fifteen minutes pass and the mother in me wants to help her along.

"Isn't this one cute?" I suggest, holding up a sweet card with a papa dog standing behind a puppy that reads, "Behind every great kid there's a great dad!" Shaking her slightly tilted head in reserved affirmation, she smiles politely and replies quite unconvincingly, "Yeah."

I stop trying - this is between father and daughter. Besides, everyone knows total

strangers can't help each other pick out cards. As I walk away, albeit empty handed, I ponder her connections to her father.

Do they play board games and go on bike rides together? Does he attend her concerts and cheer her on?

Does he listen attentively when she is speaking to him, praise good efforts and encourage her when she fails?

Do they have meaningful conversations? Are they even silly at times? Does she share fears and dreams with him? Does she possess all that I did not have with my father?

Maybe so. Otherwise, why is she standing there 30 minutes later, looking, still looking?

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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 and 2010 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contest, her columns took five first-place awards. To contact Paula, email boscodamonpaula@gmail.com, follow her blog at my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on FaceBook.

S.D. EDITORIAL ROUNDUP

The Associated Press
Rapid City Journal: June 10
Casinos responsible for security

It's unfortunate that neighborhood casinos have been the target of several armed robberies over the past year.

But casino owners shouldn't expect the Rapid City Police Department to serve as their personal armed security team.

The owners of Jokers Casino recently criticized the police department for its weak response to the robberies and suggested they do more to prevent them.

Police Chief Steve Allender said preventing crimes from occurring inside a business is an unrealistic expectation of a police force.

It's also an unrealistic expectation of taxpayers, who foot the bill for that police force.

Casino operators should consider beefing up security with an alarm system, better lighting, video cameras, or hired guards.

The owners of Jokers Casino said they did that and more: lowered the amount of cash on the property and installed a buzzer system to screen people who want to come inside. Then another robbery occurred.

If employees admitted the robber, that's hardly the fault of the police.

Perhaps they should increase screening to include requiring ID and recording who frequents the establishment. Then if a robbery occurred, they'd have the person's identity in hand.

If would-be criminals knew the casinos weren't an easy target, the rash of robberies might ease up.

Where a casino chooses to locate also plays a role in its vulnerability to crime.

They tend to draw people of limited means hoping to strike it rich, and tend to locate where they live - often in areas plagued with higher crime rates.

That's not the fault of police. It's the choice of casino owners who should take responsibility for their own operations.

Police have plenty of work to do without being expected to babysit casinos.

It's certainly their job to respond when a robbery occurs, and make an effort to nab the criminal.

It's not their job to provide the preventive security that casino owners should be covering themselves. If they don't feel safe, they can always spend their own money to change that.

Aberdeen News: June 12
Noem on ag committee: Better late than never

Rep. Kristi Noem has answered one of the biggest knocks against her by gaining a seat on the U.S. House Agriculture Committee.

Since she took office in January, critics have chided Noem for missing out on a chance to serve on the ag committee. The Noem-ag problem has been a consistent theme of letters to the editor in this and other South Dakota papers.

It would have been unusual had Noem not served on ag; South Dakota has consistently been represented there for years. Agriculture is the lifeblood of this region, and the interests of South Dakotans must be represented in Washington.

Maybe Noem didn't think the ag committee assignment was important; she said as much in several interviews earlier this year. The most damaging quote came when the *Sioux Falls Argus Leader* in January asked if she was concerned that this was the first time in 30 years that South Dakota wasn't represented on ag.

"No, it's not a concern, although that's a very important thing that I'm extremely passionate about," Noem told the paper. "I'm still going to be a big player in this farm bill."

South Dakotans let her know that an ag committee assignment should be a prime concern. To her credit, Noem recognized this disconnect. When a seat opened up on ag, she worked to gain entry.

"As someone who grew up on a South Dakota farm and ranch operation and continued there until I

ran for Congress, I understand firsthand how agriculture impacts our state's economy and why it is our No. 1 industry," Noem said in a news release. "I had always planned on serving as a strong voice for South Dakota ag. Now this new committee appointment makes it official."

Now she'll have a real say during the ongoing farm bill negotiations - setting the course for agriculture for the next several years.

Coupled with her freshman leadership position, Noem is in a good place to speak up for South Dakota. She will continue to serve on the Education and Workforce Committee and the Natural Resources Committee.

We can't imagine another job that can prepare a person for his or her first year in Congress. There are bound to be a couple of stumbles or missed opportunities.

For instance, Noem took flak for not opening an Aberdeen office right after taking office. The concern was justified; Aberdeen is home base to a large portion of the state. She eventually addressed that by opening an office in the Capitol Building - open one day a week or by appointment, but open nonetheless.

Better late than never. We'd rather our representatives recognize their missteps, listen to the people and take action to best represent their constituents - rather than stubbornly refuse to budge.

The Public Opinion, Watertown: June 8
Response to disasters is up to us

The weather has thrown one haymaker after another at much of the country this year. Blizzards pounded the Upper Great Plains, the Midwest and the Northeast for much of the winter. Flooding in the Glacial Lakes region, the Red River and along the Missouri and Mississippi rivers threatens the homes, businesses and lives of thousands of people. Meanwhile, tornadoes cut a swath of death and destruction from the Plains states to the Southeast to the Midwest and, finally, surprisingly, the

Northeast. Throw in wildfires and drought in several western and southwestern states and it doesn't take long to find someone affected by adverse weather.

What's going on? Is it the beginning of the end of the world as some doomsday prophets have predicted? Is it confirmation the global warming and climate change scientists have been warning us about for years has finally arrived? Or is it simply an unusual weather cycle that happens periodically throughout history and something that will have to play itself out over time - the kind where "Mother Nature" always wins?

We are pretty sure the doomsday prophets are all wet - the Bible is quite clear when it says multiple times only the heavenly Father will know when the end of the world is coming. So that's an exercise in futility and one we ought to quit worrying about and acting like fools over.

As for the other two, the jury is still out and we are not about to suggest one explanation is any more or less correct than the other.

But the bottom line is whatever the cause of all the bad weather in recent months, there's nothing we can do in the short term to change what has been happening and there may be nothing we can do in the long term, either. The weather will be what it is and we'll have to cope with the aftermath as best we can, just like we always have.

It's easy to point fingers or look for someone to assign blame when something out of the ordinary happens. The problem is while assigning blame may make you feel better it does nothing to help cope with the aftermath of bad weather. Rather than looking to find fault we should, instead, focus on what can be done to minimize the results if and when bad weather strikes. We should also look at what we can do to help those affected and help them in the cleanup and recovery process. Destructive weather, whatever the cause, is something people have lived with since the dawn of time. How we respond to it is up to each of us.

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Vermillion

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