



David Lias
Between The Lines

The peril of legislative 'fluff'

It's a topic that's been talked to death. We know. The problem is, this item sort of unexpectedly grew legs and took on a life of its own.

And today, it is everywhere. Yes, to the chagrin of a majority of South Dakotans who note that science deals with, well, reality, our state has been made into a laughing stock of late.

All because of a resolution introduced earlier in this session of the South Dakota Legislature by State Rep. Don Kopp of Rapid City.

Kopp somehow has gotten it into his head that the South Dakota public school system doesn't know anything about science. Or, to be more specific, how to teach it.

Here is portion of the resolution:
"...historical climatological data shows without question the earth has gone through trends where the climate was much warmer than in our present age. The Climatic Optimum and Little Climatic Optimum are two examples. During the Little Climatic Optimum, Erik the Red settled Greenland where they farmed and raised dairy cattle. Today, ninety percent of Greenland is covered by massive ice sheets, in many places more than two miles thick.

...the polar ice cap is subject to shifting warm water currents and the break-up of ice by high wind events. Many oceanographers believe this to be the major cause of melting polar ice, not atmospheric warming.

...carbon dioxide is not a pollutant but rather a highly beneficial ingredient for all plant life on earth. Many scientists refer to carbon dioxide as "the gas of life."

Climatic Optimum? High winds breaking up polar ice? The "gas of life?"

Back in the good old days, you were lucky if the rabbit ears on your TV allowed you to receive three channels, and you got most of your news from your community newspaper that didn't have a reporter in Pierre. So, in those days of old, we likely may never had heard that a measure that is so painfully unpleasant to read actually was approved by the South Dakota House. It then went on to the South Dakota Senate, where some of the craziness was removed from the measure, and it was approved by that body, too.

Today, with such modern conveniences as the internets and the World Wide Interweb and Twitter and Facepace, there are consequences to pay if you either are, or appear to be, dumb.

Everybody hears about it. Never mind that South Dakota has produced some pretty notable scientists here on our windswept prairies (winds, that I'm sure, travel north to eventually bombard the polar ice caps).

People like the Lawrence Brothers. Known as the "Father of Nuclear Medicine" and founder of the Donner Laboratory, the world's first research laboratory devoted to nuclear medicine, John Lawrence, a native of Canton, and his older brother, Ernest, were pioneers in the field of nuclear science.

Ernest Lawrence, a 1922 graduate of USD, won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1939 for his work on the Cyclotron and his research in nuclear physics.

John H. Lawrence, meanwhile, set his sights on medical research conducting experiments with radioactive phosphorus, including the development of modern nuclear medicine used to treat several forms of cancer. In 1983, he received the Enrico Fermi Award for his work and continuing leadership in nuclear medicine.

And, it's rather ironic that, while efforts are underway to establish The Deep Underground Science and Engineering Lab (DUSEL) in the former Homestake Gold Mine in the Black Hills, we have state legislators who apparently have no problem ignoring science entirely and substituting it with, well, I don't know, the opinion of Joe at the gas station who is sure, since it really snowed a lot here in South Dakota this winter, that global warming is just some silly thing made up by Al Gore.

This resolution, after all, is all Gore's fault. The aim of this measure, noting that carbon dioxide is "the gas of life" is to urge public school teachers to give students a better understanding of the climate science debate and was crafted in response to the showing of Al Gore's movie "An Inconvenient Truth" to local high school students, Kopp said.

"(In South Dakota) There is misunderstanding and very much a blurring between climate science and Al Gore," said South Dakota State Climatologist Dennis Today. "Al Gore's not here."

What people of South Dakota need, said Today, is science that helps them plan for future changes in water supplies, which are bound to come with climate changes, he said. "There are a number of scientific questions that need to be answered, but the issue is being muddled by calling (climate change) a hoax."

Today is quoted in a story that appears on the Discovery Channel's Web page on that new-fangled internet thingabob.

News of this resolution also was published on the Web page of "The New Republic," a well-read national publication. The headline of their story about this whole mess simply reads: "South Dakota Makes A Play For Dumbest State In The Nation."

Even Rachel Maddow couldn't resist taking a swipe, on her nationally broadcast television show on MSNBC, at what appears to be our intellectually-challenged Legislature.

Lawmakers, including District 17's two members of the South Dakota House, defend voting for resolutions by stating that they really don't mean anything. This resolution, just like those that are introduced honoring some high school's winning debate team, is primarily fluff.

We hope, in the future, that state legislators will remember that their actions, no matter how trivial in nature, do have consequences. What I'm sure appeared to be fluff to many lawmakers has spread like wildfire across the nation.

We're a state that puts considerable effort toward trying to attract people and university students and industry and research and other things to make life just a bit better in our part of the world.

We can't help but think that lawmakers, who we often accuse of not accomplishing much while in Pierre, have managed to make the efforts to better South Dakota's image a bit more difficult.

We don't need those types of "accomplishments" coming from our state capitol.



Bob is transported to wondrous world of 'glassies' and 'crockies'

The anticipation of springtime is a most invigorating tonic. It's Mother Nature's unbottled elixir which gets the juices flowing on the threshold of a new growing year.

Suddenly my springtime yearning turned into springtime recollections of an earlier day when crockies and glassies had higher priority than anything else.

Whether you were a country boy or city-bred, you knew in your bones when it came time to get the marbles out. They came with pussy willows, kites, baseball gloves and the first robins. Mothers rued the day because it meant extra knee patches on britches which spent too much time in close proximity with Mother Earth.

I found a jar with a small hand full of marbles in it and was lost in a reverie of years gone by. Somehow I was transported back to recess in an almost forgotten schoolyard where my classmates were on hands and knees engrossed in a game of



Bob Karolevitz
Writer At Large

"rings."

As I recall, nothing was a greater consequence than trying to win the other guy's marbles. It was far more important, for example, than a United Nations debate. (Oh yes, it was the League of Nations then.)

Nostalgically, I remembered playing "big rings" and "little rings," both drawn on the ground with a sharp stick. In "little rings" (about two feet in diameter) you shot from the outside and tried to knock marbles out of the circle. In "big rings" you knelt inside the 10 or 12-foot loop and tried to clean the ring with your shooter.

I selected the prettiest glassie from the jar and tried to shoot it between thumb and forefinger as I used to

do. It was either lack of practice or a touch of arthritis, but somehow the marble didn't eject with that same old-time force.

I grinned sheepishly as I thought of the boys who could actually crack another marble with their shooters. We had special handicaps to make it tougher, like "Knuckles down tight, three fingers flat."

My favorite marble game was "pots." Some time back in the middle of the Great Depression, I was the Yankton "pots" champion. Ah, one touch of Venus! I won a bag full of shiny new marbles. Even though we didn't have much money at the time, life was grand and the future looked great through my rose-colored glasses.

Our marbles were made of glass, baked clay or slag, agate and other stones. The most common were baked clay with a glazed, mottled finish. We called them "crockies."

For a time we had a special fad. We melted lead and poured it into bottle caps. The resultant slugs were a substitute for steelies, and we used them for pot-pitching. Unfortunately, they were too hard on the pots which were always caving in at the edges. We spent too much time digging holes in the yard for "pots" and arguing with mothers about excavating our back yards more thoroughly than moles or gophers.

I might have been standing there yet with that jar of marbles, if Phyllis hadn't broken the spell by yelling at me to come in for a phone call.

Almost tenderly, I put the colored glassies away and went into the house and back to reality.

© 2010 Robert F. Karolevitz

Is that you in front of me?

The other day, when I heard SD Public Broadcasting reporter Charles Michael Ray on location just west of Custer in the southern Black Hills of South Dakota, I got the shivers.

Ray spent the day with cavers who were charting the 150-mile mark of explored passageways in Jewel Cave, the second largest known cave in the world.

I have no desire to sliver my way through underground rock tunnels, but I sure don't mind it when others go caving and live to tell about it.

While listening to reporter Ray as he tagged along with cavers, I wondered what it would be like. I can picture myself looking cool in a pair of Dickies overalls with knee and elbow pads underneath, a bandanna wrapped around my forehead with a fluorescent hard hat on and a halogen lamp in hand.

Nevertheless, I think I would miss too many of my creature comforts on a day trip, let alone an overnight. How do you know when it is nighttime down there, anyway?

And, where does someone sleep when they're 300 feet or

MyStory YourStory



Paula Damon
Columnist

more underground? A hard surface for a resting place makes me ache just thinking about it. What about a pillow? I doubt I'd be able to pack them in my travel tote on wheels. Maybe not. With such cramped quarters, I'd probably have to leave them behind or, scarier yet, be left behind.

What if my co-splunkers snore? I suppose I could wear earplugs, but then how would I hear the bats swooping down to get me? I don't think I could sleep with the snoring and the bats. After all of that, I can't bear the thought of the bathroom issue.

Worse yet, what if I got lost like I did in Itasca State Park and that was in broad

daylight? I must admit, I am afraid of the dark. With no sun, moon or stars to light the way, I'd be hanging onto the pantleg of the person in front of me. Now that would make me really popular among the other spelunkers!

When cave diving, which is like deep-sea diving except in a cave, you're supposed to have at least three dependable light sources. I don't think a flimsy headlamp or glow sticks would give me solace — not even a laser distance finder or a compass that lights up would calm my nerves.

Maybe the thought of sparkling calcite crystals, delicate strands of gypsum and other spectacular formations would be enough to distract me. Nah, I don't think so.

I heard it's wet down there. Cavers get wet and may stay wet the whole time. I hate having wet feet, wet clothes or wet anything. I

don't like getting dirty either and caving is a dirty sport.

When I think of a day of spelunking, let alone an overnight, questions overcome me. How will I know which way is up? How will I find my way back? What if the cave caves? If cavers don't return when expected, is a caver team sent out to rescue them?

The whole idea is too overwhelming for me. Besides, what if my leader gets lost? Then what would I do?

It took a century to chart the first 150 miles of Jewel Cave and some believe there are hundreds more miles to explore. I'll leave that to the next generation of cavers.

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@iw.net, follow her blog at www.my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on Facebook.

2010© Paula Damon

PLAIN TALK
Since 1884
Official County, City and School District Newspaper
201 W. Cherry, Vermillion, SD 57069
Publication No. USPS 657-720
Editor: David Lias
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
Advertising Director: Michele Schievelbein. Advertising Sales Rep: Jennifer Newton. Composing Staff: Heidi Henson, Kathy Larson, Matt Richardson, and Tera Schmidt. Reception Office Manager: Penny Tucker. Distribution & Circulation Manager: David Jeffcoat.

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 and clarity.
 - 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.