

## Prenatal care is smart investment

The South Dakota House of Representatives approved a measure last Friday, Feb. 22, that provides prenatal care for illegal immigrants.

The measure now moves to the state Senate. We urge that body to approve the bill and also urge Gov. Dennis Daugaard to sign it when it reaches his desk.

Last week's debate concerning this legislation seemed to bring out, in our opinion, both the best and the worst of state lawmakers. It also caused a bit of head butting among the predominately Republican House members.

Republican supporters said the measure is "pro-life," and that it was worth providing important care for unborn children even if their parents happened to be illegal immigrants.

But other Republicans objected, saying the benefit to the infants was outweighed by concerns about encouraging illegal immigration and by the cost to taxpayers of providing that care.

We find those latter concerns to be a bit disconcerting. It is difficult to accept that some of our decision makers believe there are issues more important than the health of pregnant mothers and the babies they are carrying, no matter the circumstances.

Those lawmakers also are blindly ignoring the results of a study published in 2011 by South Dakota Kids Count and the Beacom School of Business at the University of South Dakota that explores health disparities and prenatal care.

We hope South Dakota has leaders in our state who are wise enough to realize that a healthy life begins before a baby is born and depends on the care during the nine months of pregnancy.

According to the National Women's Health Information Center, "babies of mothers who do not get prenatal care are three times more likely to have low birth weight and five times more likely to die than those born to mothers who do get care" ("Prenatal care", 2009). Among the South Dakota Department of Health's many health objectives to meet by 2020 is to increase the proportion of women who receive prenatal care in the first trimester from 68.9 percent in 2008 to 75 percent by 2020 (SDDOH).

Do you want to see the state health department struggle to meet those goals? Do you want to see the stats regarding South Dakota women receiving prenatal care take a huge dip? We believe, if you have a good head on your shoulders, that you don't. But that's exactly what will happen if state lawmakers ultimately deny prenatal care services because of cost or women's citizenship status.

All you have to do is take a look at what happened in Nebraska in recent years. That state disqualified low-income

women from Medicaid coverage in 2010.

Last year, however, a contingent of Nebraska lawmakers fought to restore state-funded prenatal care services. It turned out to be one of the most emotionally charged debates for Nebraska lawmakers.

Gov. Dave Heineman opposed restoring the prenatal care. Senators narrowly overrode his veto and reinstated the benefit for low-income women, many of whom were illegal immigrants.

Six months after Nebraska restored prenatal care services,

health clinics are reporting an uptick in the

percentage of women seeking medical care in the crucial first trimester of pregnancy.

The percentage of pregnant

woman who

seek first-trimester care during their first visit to the OneWorld

Community Health Center in Omaha has increased from an

average of 78 percent before the coverage was available to 85

percent in the last four months of 2012.

That uptick in services to women and their unborn babies in Nebraska is under threat again. Sen. Charlie Janssen, of Fremont, NE, a vocal opponent of illegal immigration, has introduced a bill this year to repeal the law. And in his proposed two-year budget to lawmakers, Heineman recommends pulling \$786,000 in yearly funding for the services.

The South Dakota Senate should work to avoid similar turmoil and approve the prenatal care legislation. No doubt legislators may hear arguments opposing such action. They'll be told that allowing the benefits at public expense rewards illegal behavior and diverts money from services for legal residents.

That "public expense," in our thinking, is worth it. Offering prenatal care to all low-income women is highly cost-effective.

The Kids Count study from 2011 notes: "As the population of racial and ethnic minorities continues to climb, efforts must be directed at closing the gap in health and health care. Early and adequate prenatal care is a relatively simple and cost-effective measure that allows the physician to monitor the growing fetus, provide support and advice on issues such as smoking cessation or proper nutrition to the mother, and educate the mother what she should expect."

South Dakota, in making an effort to try to do everything it can to support all pregnant women, will be making a smart investment by approving this legislation.

inspection area. This bill failed 22-47. HB 1204 addressed the Common Core Standards. This bill would require the Board of Education to obtain legislative approval before adopting any further standards. This bill passed 36-32. HB 1010 and HB 1222, bills addressing gun laws, were killed in committee. HB 1214 passed the House 39-28. This bill will provide prenatal care for certain unborn children.

I encourage you to look at these and all other bills on line at [legis.state.sd.us](http://legis.state.sd.us).

### BETWEEN THE LINES



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## Blackmon is changing the world

"Deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some day..." We Shall Overcome, anthem, American Civil Rights Movement

When co-founder of the National Voting Rights Museum & Institute in Selma, AL, Joanne Bland speaks, people listen.

It's not Ms. Bland's resounding baritone voice, distinct and articulate, that causes us to take notice.

It's her story that commands our attention, so much so that we can't help but wait on every word. Not just one story, but hundreds, no, thousands that represent her experiences and those of so many others who grew up in the segregated South. True accounts that penetrate our world and then go onto to shatter our sensibilities of what's normal in America.

Ms. Bland's accounts do not have soft "Once upon a time..." beginnings. Nor do they have happy endings. Instead, she ushers in - front and center - the truth about our history of mistreatment of Blacks in America.

She personally hand-delivers the atrocious treatment, including discrimination, torture and murder of African Americans throughout her years as a young protester during the Civil Rights Movement, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Today, as an educator, spiritual guide and mentor, Ms. Bland enlightens her audiences with facts about Black History that we all must reckon with and never forget.

Calling up ugly details conveniently left out, overlooked or simply not focused on when we studied American history, hers is a reality check - a litany of injustices of being

### MY STORY YOUR STORY



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growing up poor and black in the Deep South, circa 1950s and 1960s, Ms. Bland stays keenly focused on topic.

She shares history lessons for us all, which do not belong to her alone, but are shared by her forefathers and mothers, hundreds of thousands of African Americans who sojourned after the Civil War when slaves were supposed to be freed, but were not really free due to our nation's repressive white culture at the time.

One is titled "The Bus Ride" from a collection, "Stories of Struggle" written by Ms. Bland and her sister Lynda Blackmon Lowery.

Every year when school was out, her father put her, two sisters and little brother, Al, on a bus to Uniontown, AL, to spend the summer with their grandmother. One such summer, it was only she and Al who made the summer journey.

denied freedoms we take for granted.

One such account tells of the gruesome unfairness of being jailed at age 11. It was not just an overnight stay in jail, but for days, she was locked in a crowded cell meant for two people, only 40 Black protesters were packed in with her, all for wanting the same freedoms as white folks.

Joanne Bland does not mince words, either. Telling it like it was,

Boarding the transit at Uniontown, they saw that no other passengers were on the bus. Excited, Al sat in the first seat so he could have the thrill of watching the driver.

The driver told him to move to the back of the bus, but Al did not move, contesting that he could have his pick of seats, since no one else was on the bus.

The driver proceeded to use the "N" word, crudely commanding that those of Al's and Joanne's race only ride in the back of the bus.

At that moment, Al's innocence was shattered, and Joanne's heart ached for her little brother. Taking his hand, nine-year-old Joanne gently pulled him to the back, where they rode in silence 30 miles to Uniontown.

Upon arriving at their destination, she told her grandma what had happened. Holding Al, his grandmother reassured him that one day, he would sit wherever he wanted to sit on that bus. One day, he could even drive the bus. One day, he could own the bus.

Today, that little boy, who more than 50 years ago was denied the freedom of sitting wherever he wished on an empty bus, owns a fleet of vans that transport the elderly and ill to medical facilities throughout town.

While he did not buy the bus, Joanne explains, he transports people of all races wherever they want to go, treating everyone who boards his vans with equal respect and dignity.

Alfred Blackmon, Jr., is making this world a better place - one bus ride at a time.

### Greetings from Pierre:

## Medicare, prenatal care topics of debate

By Ray Ring  
District 17

Soon after Gov. Daugaard took office, he appointed a Task Force on Infant Mortality.

This diverse group, including several medical experts, issued its final report in December 2011. It reported that South Dakota county data showed a strong correlation between the percent of mothers receiving early prenatal care and the infant mortality rate.

In the final report's words, "Early and regular prenatal care has a strong association with infant survival."

In other words, early prenatal care saves babies' lives. The Task Force's first recommendation is to "improve access to early, comprehensive prenatal care."

These findings and the recommendation are relevant to

the Legislature's deliberations. House Bill 1214 would provide prenatal care to undocumented immigrant mothers in South Dakota. Their babies will be U.S. citizens when they are born.

This proposal was the subject of intense debate on the House floor last week. Even though I think it is a profoundly pro-life bill that any pro-life person would readily and emphatically support, several people who usually vote pro-life spoke against it on the floor and voted against it.

It seems that for some people economic issues pre-empt the right to life. The bill prevailed, 39-28, and now goes to the Senate.

SB 140, "to expand Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women," would raise the maximum income a pregnant woman could receive and still receive health insurance. It has been

tabled in the Senate, which means its fate is in doubt. Similar bills in past years have died in committee.

This week the House and Senate Health and Human Services Committees held a joint hearing to receive testimony on expanding Medicaid. As I reported in an earlier column, South Dakota has the opportunity to expand Medicaid to include many more low-income adults at minimal cost to the state.

Tim Tracy, CEO of Sanford Vermillion came from Vermillion to testify for the expansion, as did Denny Davis, a retiree from rural Vermillion. I was pleased to have both men represent the district in this important matter.

As we approach the end of the session (two weeks left), the Joint Appropriations

Committee will be making decisions on dividing up the state's very limited resources. They have spent long hours hearing requests from state government agencies as well as representatives of local governments and other interested groups. I don't envy their difficult task.

Sen. Tom Jones from District 17 has done yeoman duty on this committee and I know he is representing us well.

Please don't forget the cracker barrel this Saturday, March 2, 10 a.m. in the Vermillion City Hall. I still need to hear your views on the many important issues still to come before the House.

Contact me at [Rep.Ring@state.sd.us](mailto:Rep.Ring@state.sd.us) or (605) 675-9379 (my cell).

### Legislative notes:

## Last Wednesday was crossover day

By Rep. Nancy Rasmussen  
District 17

Last Wednesday was crossover day for the House and Senate. On crossover day all House bills had to move over to the Senate and all the Senate bills had to come to the House.

The House of Representative members were diligently addressing legislation on crossover day until past 9 p.m.

I would like to draw your attention to a few of the bills we deliberated on.

HB 1089 was a livestock identification bill, in a nutshell, this bill would have required the entire state to be a brand

inspection area. This bill failed 22-47.

HB 1204 addressed the Common Core Standards. This bill would require the Board of Education to obtain legislative approval before adopting any further standards. This bill passed 36-32.

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### Guest commentary:

## Thune: SD hoops move to big stage

By Sen. John Thune

As a young high school basketball player, it was not until this time of year that I would allow myself to start thinking about playing on the biggest stage in South Dakota - the state basketball tournament.

I remember the nervous energy in the room as I sat through pep rallies, boarded the bus on the way to district championships, and sat in the locker room minutes before the game. I remember thinking that the extra time I spent practicing free throws, and running sprints,

and defensive drills was all worth it for the shot to play at the state "B" basketball tournament.

While I never had the opportunity to play in the state "B" basketball tournament, I know that the leadership, teamwork, and dedication I learned on the court provided me with essential life lessons. These life lessons were also inspired by my time spent in the gym with my father, Harold Thune. My dad, who was a longtime teacher, coach, and athletic director at Murdo, taught each of his kids and players about the importance of hard work and sportsmanship.

This year the Murdo Auditorium was renamed after my dad in honor of his lifetime of service to Murdo athletics. This was a special recognition for him and our whole family who grew up playing basketball in the Murdo gym.

Spending time at the state basketball tournaments, I frequently run into some of the athletes I played against in high school who have come to watch their own sons and daughters compete in the state basketball tournament. I know each of them takes pride in seeing their children enjoy and excel at a sport that was

meaningful to them. Stories like these form some of the great South Dakota basketball traditions, and bring together families, communities, and schools to celebrate the accomplishments of our student-athletes.

I hope that all of the participants in this year's tournaments take time to enjoy the experience and that each of the communities make it out to support their teams. Good luck to all participants in this year's tournaments, and I look forward to seeing many South Dakotans at the games.

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