

VIEWPOINTS

SD will likely pay later, not now

There was popular commercial years ago for oil filters.

It featured a somewhat frustrated mechanic about to begin work on fixing a car whose owner didn't change his vehicle's filter, thus ruining the engine.

He notes, while rolling out from under the car, that if the owner had simply paid about \$4 for a new oil filter, he wouldn't be facing the hundreds of dollars of repairs to the engine.

"You can pay me now, or pay me later," the mechanic said with a frustrated look on his face.

I'm often reminded of that commercial from long ago whenever I hear state lawmakers talk about expanding Medicaid in South Dakota.

Health care and car maintenance are certainly two very different topics, but I think it's safe to say that the two practices have one goal in common – to save money.

We all regularly take our cars to our favorite mechanics for routine tune-ups, oil changes, etc. because we know, in the long run, paying to have such work done will actually keep our vehicles running smoothly and will, in turn, save us money.

BETWEEN THE LINES



DAVID LIAS
david.lias@plaintalk.net

I can't help but wonder if Medicaid expansion in South Dakota wouldn't accomplish the same goal – if it wouldn't help ensure that the engine that powers our state will get

a needed tune-up.

Currently, South Dakota's Medicaid program covers about 116,000 children, adults and disabled people.

Look closely under South Dakota's hood, however, and you'll find a few spark plugs that need replacing and a cylinder or two that is out of sync.

Expanding Medicaid eligibility would add an estimated 48,500 people, mostly adults without children, to the program in our state.

Under the federal Affordable Care Act, states are asked – but not required – to expand their Medicaid programs to cover people earning up to 138 percent

of the poverty line. Right now, Medicaid in South Dakota covers children, parents, the elderly and the disabled, but almost no able-bodied adults. An estimated 48,000 uninsured South Dakotans would gain coverage under Medicaid if the state expanded eligibility.

The federal government has promised to pay 90 percent or more of the cost of covering those new individuals, though South Dakota's share still would cost millions of dollars per year.

It would be a big step toward getting our state humming much more smoothly than it is currently. It would, for example, reduce cost shifting for overall health care to those who have insurance. It would reduce out-of-pocket health care costs for low-income people. It would provide an economic stimulus to the state.

Is it a perfect solution? No... in some ways, it's like that oil change your car experienced just a week ago. It's not a permanent fix. You will have to take your car back to the shop, eventually, and pay to have the oil changed again.

To expand Medicaid, we, as a state, would have to fork over some money.

A state task force that studied the issue over the summer

estimates that if Medicaid is expanded, the state would pay about \$102 million through 2020 as its share of covering additional patients and administering the expanded program.

But consider this – the federal government would spend an extra \$2.1 billion in South Dakota for an expanded program from 2014 through 2020.

That federal spending is what makes the idea of expanding Medicaid appealing to many South Dakotans, while causing many others to think it's a bad idea, including our governor and many of our state's leaders.

We realize this is a complicated decision, with political, budgetary, moral and philosophical considerations. South Dakota isn't alone in resisting the idea; there currently are at least 20 states that have refused to expand their Medicaid programs to cover uninsured low-income people.

We don't deny that expanding Medicare would not necessarily be a smooth and easy process in our state. An additional 48,500 Medicaid recipients could strain a health care system that already has a shortage of primary care doctors, nurses and others, in rural areas.

But, as Sen. Billie Sutton, D-Burke observed in a news story last fall, South Dakotans will pay federal income taxes to support the national health care overhaul even if the state does not expand Medicaid.

As of Feb. 7, 25 states have agreed to various forms of Medicaid expansion. They include our neighbors – North Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa.

We believe more states will follow, meaning the federal taxes we South Dakotans pay Uncle Sam will go towards helping the poor in those neighboring states, along with places like Hawaii and Arizona, California and Connecticut, and Michigan and Massachusetts. While we will be helping those participating states, we'll be denying health care to our own poor.

In other words, we are already paying for the expansion of Medicare now. It is foolish for South Dakotans to be the beneficiaries of that later, but that's likely what will happen.

It may not happen this year. We believe South Dakota's political leaders will soon come to realize, especially as more states expand Medicare, that its advantages outweigh its disadvantages.

Capitol Notebook:

Legislature seeks power re-balance between branches

By Bob Mercer
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE – In their search for a new executive director for the professional staff, the Legislature's leaders "would like to begin taking steps to achieve an appropriate balance" between the legislative branch and the executive branch.

That quote is an excerpt from the help-wanted ad posted on the Legislative Research Council's Web site.

But it's not the lands commissioner or state treasurer who has too much power for the Legislature's liking. It's the governor.

And it's not just Dennis Daugaard, either.

This is a chronic condition. South Dakota's state government is designed this way. The state constitution says the Legislature can meet a maximum of 40 days annually.

The legislators don't use the full 40 days, however. The last time was the 2009 session. The standard since then is 38 days, such as this year's session. The 2012 session was just 33 days.

The legislators are paid \$6,000 annually, plus a daily expense allowance while in session or traveling on official business. Their primary sources of income aren't their legislative paychecks.

Because of that, they have developed a four-day week for legislative work while in session. Most have drives of two to four hours each way between home and the Capitol.

Rarely does a legislator spend the weekend in Pierre during session, aside from the trio who represent the Pierre district.

Meanwhile the governor is working, in some fashion, every day of the year.

At least some of his aides – cell phones, texting and e-mails have made every day a work day in some way – and some of his Cabinet are working

every day or nearly every day, too.

That's the nature of their jobs and in many instances the people chosen by the governor for those jobs.

Their government service isn't part time. Their annual pay also isn't merely \$6,000. They're making between 10 and 20 times that much.

The Legislature has a full-time staff of 24, plus 30 people who work in temporary clerical and administrative posts during the annual legislative sessions.

The governor has a team of perhaps 100 or more professionals who are paid well by South Dakota standards. They include one dozen senior aides, 22 Cabinet members and scores of deputy secretaries and division-level directors.

Then there are many more program administrators in each of the departments and bureaus.

It's easy to see why – I'm quoting again from the help-wanted ad – "there is a consensus among legislative leaders that the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches has been heavily slanted toward the executive branch for many years."

The Legislature's Executive Board contracted with the National Conference of State Legislatures last year to perform a review of the South Dakota operations including the Legislative Research Council.

That report's findings and recommendations, and the Executive Board's response, led to the resignation by Jim Fry. He was LRC director 13 years. His predecessor, Terry Anderson, held the job 16 years before taking a similar post in Wisconsin.

Their stability was valuable. Now comes necessary change. Next week's column will look at ways the Legislature can be stronger. It doesn't have to be heavy lifting.

STAR TRIBUNE/CagleCartoons.com

STAR TRIBUNE

POST-OLYMPIC OPENING CEREMONY



Second season for old 'young' man

We're in the car, heading northeast to Orange City, IA, a one-hour drive from home. My retired husband, Brian, 63, has returned to college to study art after a 32-year absence.

Earlier this year, he got up enough courage to enter one of his newer works "To Surrender Dreams" a 64-by-40-inch acrylic painting in an art contest.

It's a massive totally abstract piece festooned with hundreds of bursts of white and red and black droplets, raining down at gravity's beckoning. And, it was selected by the Orange City Arts Council for a recent exhibit on the campus of Northwestern College.

"So what's it like?" I asked him as we headed to this, his first public art showing since high school.

"I talked to Nan (his art professor) about it. It's an internal thing, not cognitive or calculating. It's something inside me – I've got to make art," was his ethereal reply.

After spending the bulk of his life, 40 years, as a psychiatric social worker, Brian has entered a new season – one in which he is answering an interior call as an artist.

"It's the first time I've put myself out there to the general public, since I submitted my woodcut "Anguish" in 1969. That was for an exhibit at the James Prendergast Library in Jamestown, NY. I was a senior in high school.

"I think about all of those years since I last took art in college – the long periods of time my creative process was inactive. I thought of the phrase if you don't use it, you lose it. But when the time came, the energy and passion were right there – a long drawn out gestation period.

"Not everyone experiences life in this way, I have to wonder, as with everything, if there is something

MY STORY YOUR STORY



PAULA DAMON
paula.damon@iw.net

This is a new life, a rebirth – something that has been born again in me.

"Occasionally over the years, I was compelled to pick up a brush, a pencil or pen and do art, but then my drive would fall dormant again. I think it was because I didn't pay attention to the artist in me. At least that's how I explain my gaps of inactivity.

"The art I'm doing now is very different from how I used to approach it. Today, it isn't all about me. When I start a piece, I try to get out of the way and let randomness, gravity and chance take over."

And then, with his hands affixed to the steering wheel, his eyes glued to the road, slightly turning toward me, Brian inquired, "Do I look like an artist," with a bit of vulnerability in his voice.

"Yes," I reassured. "You most certainly do look like an artist," I reiterated, my sensibilities awash with affirmation as he mines this new way he is making for himself. "What does an artist look like, anyway?"

"Different," he sized up. "Put a few artists in a room full of others and you can easily spot them. They

genetic that's kept me close to art, drawing me back again and again. How was it that my passion for art stayed with me all those years?

"I don't get excited about a lot of things, but I can compare this to the joy I encountered at the births of our grandchildren.

stand out with a little bit of an edge, a flair here and there and an innate charisma."

"How are you doing?" I quizzed as we neared the exhibit hall.

"I'm nervous because it is a new experience. I think I'm experiencing anxiety, too."

"How so?"

"My stomach is fluttering. Adrenaline surges are keeping company with my self-doubt. I ask myself, 'Why did I do this?' But then I remind myself - this is what I've been waiting for. A lifelong process has gotten me to this point."

"How did you get here?"

"It all started when one of my professors said he could look at this piece for hours and that he would pay \$1,200, if it were for sale. He made some suggestions to improve it. I tried following his instructions and with a little work and a series of changes; it was only worth \$5.70. I felt that I had ruined it. So I started over and this is what I ended up with – an art piece accepted for others to view."

Standing back and observing my husband, I can't describe the duality of lightness and levity in this moment. It was like watching a fledgling venturing away from our nest – bedded down so hard, like a rock, from all the years of strife and toil.

Now Brian is going in a new direction – one he had longed for ever or at least since he was six, maybe seven years old – more than half a century ago.

Now an old man, he is being made anew and I am witnessing it with my own eyes.

It's one of those things you don't know where the emotion is coming from – but it's real. It's powerful – and it's good.

Vermillion

PLAIN
TALK

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

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 Manager: Kathy Larson

Composing Staff: Rob Buckingham,

Mathew Wienbar & Sally Whiting.

Reception Office Manager: Penny Ascheman

Distribution & Circulation Manager: Mike Hrycko