

## VIEWPOINTS

## Appreciating The State's Law Enforcement

BY GOV. DENNIS DAUGAARD

We are fortunate to live in a relatively safe state. We tend to leave our cars running in the winter; we let our kids play outside; and, in some places, people lock their car doors not worrying about theft, but because they don't want their neighbors leaving them any more zucchini.

It's true that less populated places tend to be safer, but our public safety is not owed solely to our rural nature. It is also thanks to our law enforcement.

Those who enforce our laws live selfless lives. They're courageous, hardworking and dedicated individuals. They work long hours and willingly put themselves in harm's way to protect South Dakotans. They don't simply serve to reprimand those who don't follow the law, but to help those in need. State troopers will often stop to help someone change a flat tire. They come to the rescue when someone is stranded on the road during a blizzard. Police officers and deputy sheriffs lead the processions for local funerals and they support their communities when disaster strikes. Our state, local and tribal law

enforcement officers are critically important to our communities, and they deserve our appreciation.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to the families of law enforcement officers. These families also make sacrifices. They must adjust to overtime, odd hours and emergencies. They patiently endure as their loved ones risk their lives to keep us safe. They assume brave faces even as they worry whether their

spouse or parent will come home safe and sound.

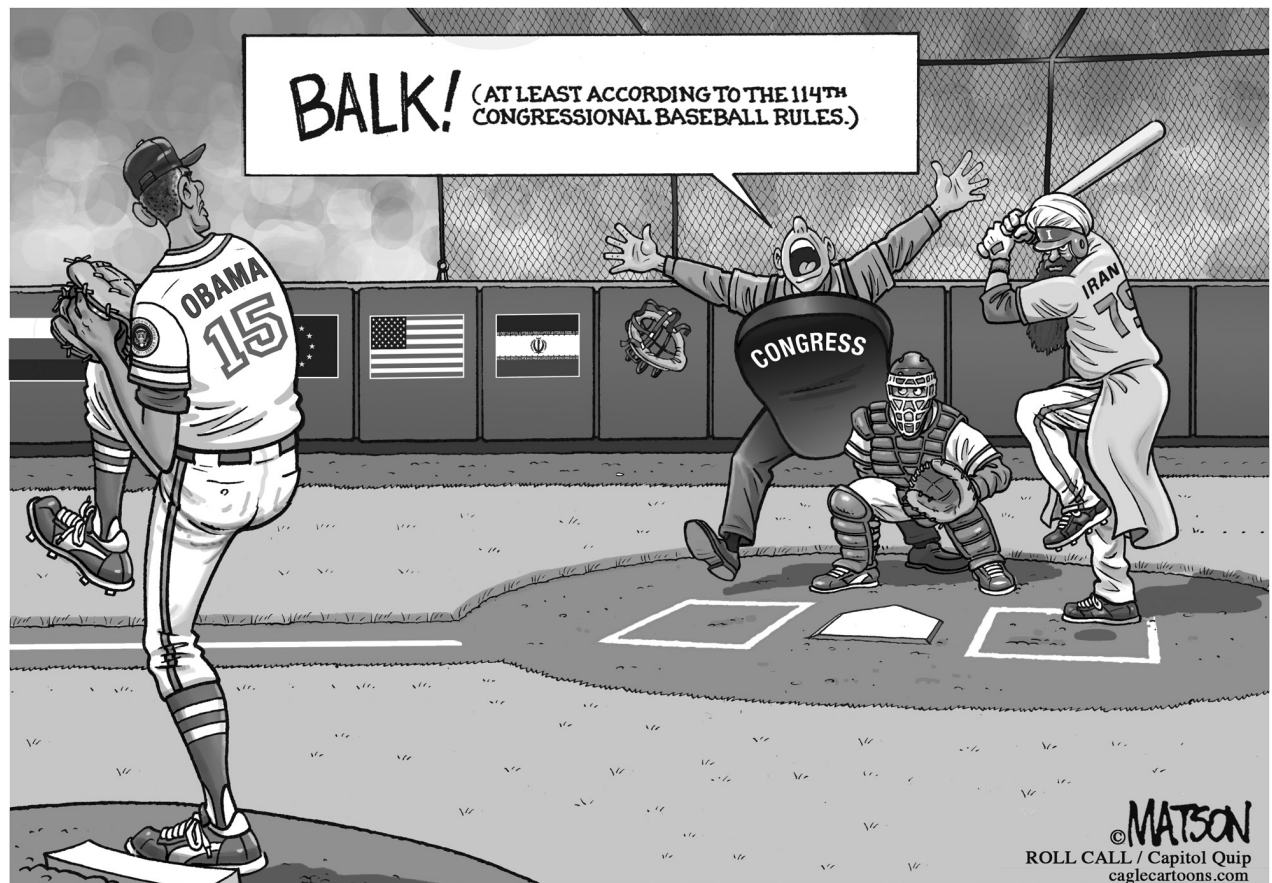
It's easy to forget that our safe South Dakota is not the norm. There are many places in the world today where people live in chaos because laws are not enforced – where people face daily uncertainty over whether they'll be able to protect themselves and their families.

Because of the men and women who enforce our laws South Dakota is not one of those places and we are able to live in a safe and free society.

To all of our state, local, and tribal law enforcement officers and their families, thank you for keeping us safe. Though we probably don't show it nearly enough, South Dakotans are grateful for your service.



DENNIS DAUGAARD



## You Know, You Never Know

BY PAULA DAMON

It was a simple little do-it-yourself project on my never-ending "to-do" list. Painting fan blades to match the bedroom ceiling I had redone in a sandy beach color.

After first unfolding and then spreading out yesterday's newspaper over the kitchen counter, readying my work space, I notice six faces smiling back at me from Section A, Page 4 of the Obituaries.

Honestly, I didn't see this one coming – the way it made me feel and all. You know, somewhat weirdly irrelevant.

Shaking and then prying open the paint can, I try dismissing these new acquaintances, but to no avail.

Caught off guard, I'm feeling quite indulgent and a tad bit insensitive, standing here dipping and dabbing my brush before painting long strokes across those blades, which I have propped up onto Green Giant bean cans borrowed from the pantry.

I can't stop looking at them, their entire lives chronicled here beneath my hands from their births to deaths and every milestone in between – their parents, marriages, children, jobs, accomplishments.

Forming ledgers of sorts, lifelong summations, and each article is only eight to 12 inches in length – some



PAULA DAMON

shorter than others.

Overwhelmed, I can't stop thinking about how their days are now over.

Completely done.

No more planning ahead or looking back. Never again will they make the bed or make love, cook dinner or complain

about the weather, shoot the breeze or pass the time.

One right after another in a routine lineup formatted only to tell us who's gone.

Their photos meant for another reason, mug shots, if you will, possibly snapped at work or weddings, parties or picnics, in service to the military or in celebration of marriages. But that was another day.

Unbeknownst to them, these departed have been granted the dubious place as members of the Class of February 2015.

Some died unexpectedly on a day they blew their final kisses before heading out, fully anticipating returning home that evening. Others had a turn in health or died of lengthy illnesses.

Can't help but wonder about the last

hours of the ones who passed suddenly. Little did they know they were hugging the kids or grandkids, petting the dog, cooking supper or carrying out any number of routine acts for the very last time in one grand finale at death's doorstep.

Unable to continue painting, I suddenly halt my frenetic pace and begin reading about this battalion: a telephone operator, construction worker, an engineer, entrepreneur and a disc jockey.

I strain to read between the lines, combing diligently through the customary "She worked 20 years for..." and "He enjoyed woodworking, fishing and boating" and "Survivors include..." "He was born in..." "They were married on..." "She is preceded in death by..." "In lieu of flowers..."

How their loved ones must feel right now, attempting to wrap their arms around such uncommon emptiness left behind these final curtain calls?

At long last, I pick up my brush again and try going about my business, insignificant as it now seems in light of what has just transpired.

Ignoring the nagging notion that tomorrow's paper could carry my mug shot in Section A, Page 4, taken at some happy place umpteen years ago, smiling back at you.

You never know.

## DRAWING COMPARISONS

BY JANELLE CARLSON

Native Americans find resemblance between the Iraq War, ISIS and the genocide of Iraqi minorities.

While those of the Rosebud Sioux Reservation sometimes find it difficult to track world affairs, a fact, they say, that is particularly due to the discrimination they face from their neighbors and the U.S. government, the Iraq War and its aftershocks have certainly been noted, even as the tribe fights against the XXL pipeline.

In 2003, Native Americans watched the invasion of Iraq with a certain sympathy for the Iraqi people and a wry sense of humor even as they filled the ranks of the American Armed Forces. After the invasion, jokes such as, "So now the government will have a Bureau of Iraqi Affairs too" and "Soon their [Iraqi] tribes will be on reservations", would abound at meetings. More seriously, comparisons were made between Iraqi oil and Indian land.

Now that the U.S. has withdrawn forces and ISIS has begun its genocidal campaign against the Shia, Yezidi, and other Iraqi minorities. Native Americans, on and off the reservation, are drawing similarities between Iraq and their own situation, only this time, there is no laughter.

ISIS's campaign against the Yezidi, an ethnoreligious minority of Northern Iraq, "may" be considered genocide by the United Nations, but to members of the Sioux tribe the answer is clear. "its genocide" stated one official of the Rosebud Sioux tribe, "I don't know how the U.N. defines genocide, but to us, when you kill children its genocide. That's what happened to us. Our children were killed too. The 7th Calvary was our ISIS."

Furthermore, the apparent consensus in the community appears to be that any nation, or indeed any person with humanity who can should move to stop the genocide of Iraqi minorities by the Islamic State. This goes double for the United States, who the Lakota believe, has a duty to protect those who have been targeted.

The same official, when asked about the situation of Iraqi translators, who were targets of extremists even when the United States occupied Iraq, would go a step further. "As the owner of the land, I can say the United States, by recruiting these people, the US has a responsibility to them. [the translators] must absolutely be given refuge." He would end on a bitter note, however, remembering that the US had a responsibility to the Native Americans, as well. Yet every treaty has been broken.

## LETTER TO 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 300 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, clarity and newspaper style in mind.

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 to the Editor, 201 W. Cherry St., Vermillion, SD 57069, drop off at 201 W. Cherry in Vermillion, fax to 624-4696 or e-mail to shauna.marlette@plaintalk.net.

## Prescription Drug Prices Climb Into The Stratosphere

BY TRUDY LIEBERMAN  
Rural Health News Service

There's no getting around it. Americans are using more medications and spending more for them. The latest evidence just came from Express Scripts, the pharmacy benefit manager, which acts as a middleman between drug makers and employers. The number of Americans—almost 600,000—with yearly medication costs of more than \$50,000 rose 63 percent from 2013 to 2014. The group of patients with costs over \$100,000 nearly tripled.

By any measure these are huge increases that don't signal much hope that the U.S. can bring down its medical spending, which is now over 17 percent of the country's national income. Express Scripts was frank about the long-term impact on employers and others who actually pay most of those bills. It's an "unsustainable \$52 billion a year."

Who are the patients with these stratospheric drug expenses? Nearly 60 percent are Baby Boomers, and over half of those with expenses greater than \$100,000 are men. Nearly two-thirds are taking 10 or more different medications. The use of antidepressants was more than twice as prevalent among these heavy users as it is in the general population.

What's wrong with that? Don't we want people to have the latest and greatest drugs? After all, we've been conditioned for decades now to believe that modern medicines work miracles. Of course, some have, but others have not. Yet it has become ingrained in the American psyche that patients are entitled to these medicines no matter the cost.

Perhaps that's why we tolerate those intrusive drug company commercials that bombard us at the dinner table with cures for toenail fungus.

But those ads work. They motivate consumers to ask about the drugs being hyped. Most of the time the docs prescribe them.

Cancer medications, hepatitis C drugs like Sovaldi with its \$84,000 annual price tag, and compounded medications, which use ingredients mixed together in the exact strength and dosage required by the patient are the main culprits for the increases, Express Scripts said. A year ago Express Scripts, which works on behalf of insurers, stopped covering some 1,000 active ingredients compounding pharmacies use for ointments, creams, and powders shifting some of the cost to patients.

Not long ago I talked to Peter Bach, a physician and epidemiologist at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, about the high cost of drugs. He echoed the Express Scripts findings. Bach told me makers of cancer drugs can pretty much do what they want in setting prices. The worst that happens is that a journalist writes a story about super-high prices, and the practice continues.

Bach has called for freeing insurers and government programs from requirements to include all expensive drugs in their plans and explaining to the public that some are not effective enough to justify the price, or setting prices equal to those in Western Europe, which are usually determined through government and drug company negotiations. Either way, he says, it's better than we have now.

What about the claim that the high cost of developing these drugs justifies their high price tags? In mid-May a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found the highly profitable drug and biotech industries "actually spend only a small fraction of their revenues on truly innovative research." The study noted that large drug companies did not develop some

of the most important recent new drugs but acquired them by purchasing the biotech companies that did. In its first year of sales, Gilead, the company selling Sovaldi, totally recouped the \$11 billion it paid for the rights to market the drug.

The public is becoming more skeptical and starting to question both prices and drug company marketing practices. "A year ago there was little discussion," says John Rother, who heads a group called the National Coalition on Health Care. "Today that is 100 percent reversed," and the group's Campaign for Sustainable Rx Pricing may be catching on. "But I think we're still a long way from agreement about what to do," he said.

Increasingly all consumers will bear the costs of high-priced medicines through higher deductibles and more cost-sharing. Sovaldi and similar drugs added \$4.5 billion to Medicare spending last year, more than 15 times what Medicare paid for older hepatitis C drugs the year before. Only as Medicare beneficiaries and everyone else with prescription drug coverage feels the pinch, will there be any serious chance that people's voices will be loud enough to effect any changes. That will happen, as Express Scripts pointed out, when the prices become unsustainable.

We'd like to hear about your experiences with paying for medications. Write to Trudy at trudy.lieberman@gmail.com.

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