



David Lias
Between The Lines

Remember, the illness is worse than the shot

It was heartening to see the turnout at the point of distribution (POD) flu clinic held at Vermillion High School last Thursday. It demonstrated that a good number of citizens from Clay and Union counties are concerned about the H1N1 flu, and the seasonal flu, for that matter.

There's good reason to be. Late last month, the Centers for Disease Control noted that, nationwide, H1N1 had claimed more than 1,000 lives, including nearly 100 pediatric cases.

South Dakota's flu activity was continuing its upward trend through the week ending Oct. 24 – in other words, the week before the POD clinic in Vermillion.

By Oct. 24, according to the South Dakota Department of Health, there were 421 new H1N1 cases in the state. Seventy-three people in the state were hospitalized because of the illness, and five deaths were reported.

The state health department's cumulative numbers, from Sept. 1 through Oct. 24, show that there have been 1,286 cases statewide, with 232 hospitalizations and nine deaths.

The median age of South Dakotans succumbing to the flu, as of Oct. 24, is 48. The youngest fatality was 8, the oldest, 96. Nearly 90 percent of the deaths were male.

As of late October, about 8 percent of school children were absent because of the flu. To put that figure in perspective, out of 248 schools reporting, there were 83,462 absences.

And, nationally, according to the most recent report from the state health department, flu activity was widespread in 46 states and influenza-like illness, flu-related hospitalizations and flu-related deaths are all higher than expected for this time of year.

In other words, it's probably a good idea to get both a seasonal flu shot and a H1N1 shot.

The H1N1 vaccine at last week's clinic in Vermillion was given primarily to young children and people who fall in high-risk categories. There were approximately 1,000 doses left over; that couldn't be given last week because of the restrictive rules set down by the state health department.

That's not necessarily bad news. It means that people who didn't fit the rather narrow qualifications of last week's POD should likely be able to eventually get a H1N1 shot, should they desire, from their doctor or local medical clinic.

When it's clear that availability of the vaccine warrants more widespread distribution, we encourage everyone to get a shot.

We feel certain it's the right thing to do, despite the numerous opinion pieces that have appeared of late stating that since the vaccine is new and not all that much is known about it, people should avoid getting a shot.

Those concerns have been voiced locally. Tucker Knutson, a columnist for USD's *Volante*, joined the group of H1N1 vaccine naysayers. In early October, in a column entitled "Think before getting H1N1 vaccine," he wrote:

"It is up to families and individuals to make their own educated decisions pertaining to the receiving of a flu vaccine this year. One must come to a conclusion that decides whether getting sick with H1N1 or receiving a potentially unsafe vaccine is a higher risk to their health."

South Dakota's "traditional" flu season hasn't arrived yet. Yet in our sparsely populated, wide-open prairie state, nearly 1,300 have been ill with the flu, over 200 have been hospitalized, and nine people have died. One of the near-fatalities, who thankfully is recovering at home after a touch-and-go battle with the illness, is a USD student.

People who spread fear about the H1N1 vaccine usually never mention one important piece of information: the illness is deadlier than the inoculation.

Approved vaccines – including the 2009 H1N1 swine flu vaccine – are calculated to be much, much less risky than the diseases they prevent. For example, out of every million people who get a flu shot, one or two will get a serious neurological reaction called Guillain-Barre syndrome (GBS).

But flu itself causes serious problems, including GBS, in far more than two in a million cases. And since a large proportion of the population will get swine flu, the vaccine risk is far smaller than the disease risk.

Daniel J. DeNoon, writing for WebMD, notes that in clinical trials, 10,000 to 15,000 children and adults have received various manufacturers' brands of H1N1 swine flu vaccine. Nothing serious happened to any of them. DeNoon himself received a double dose of the swine flu vaccine. He reports that he's feeling fine.

That, of course, isn't proof that no harm will come from the vaccine. Clinical trials cannot detect something bad that happens to one or two out of every 100,000 people vaccinated.

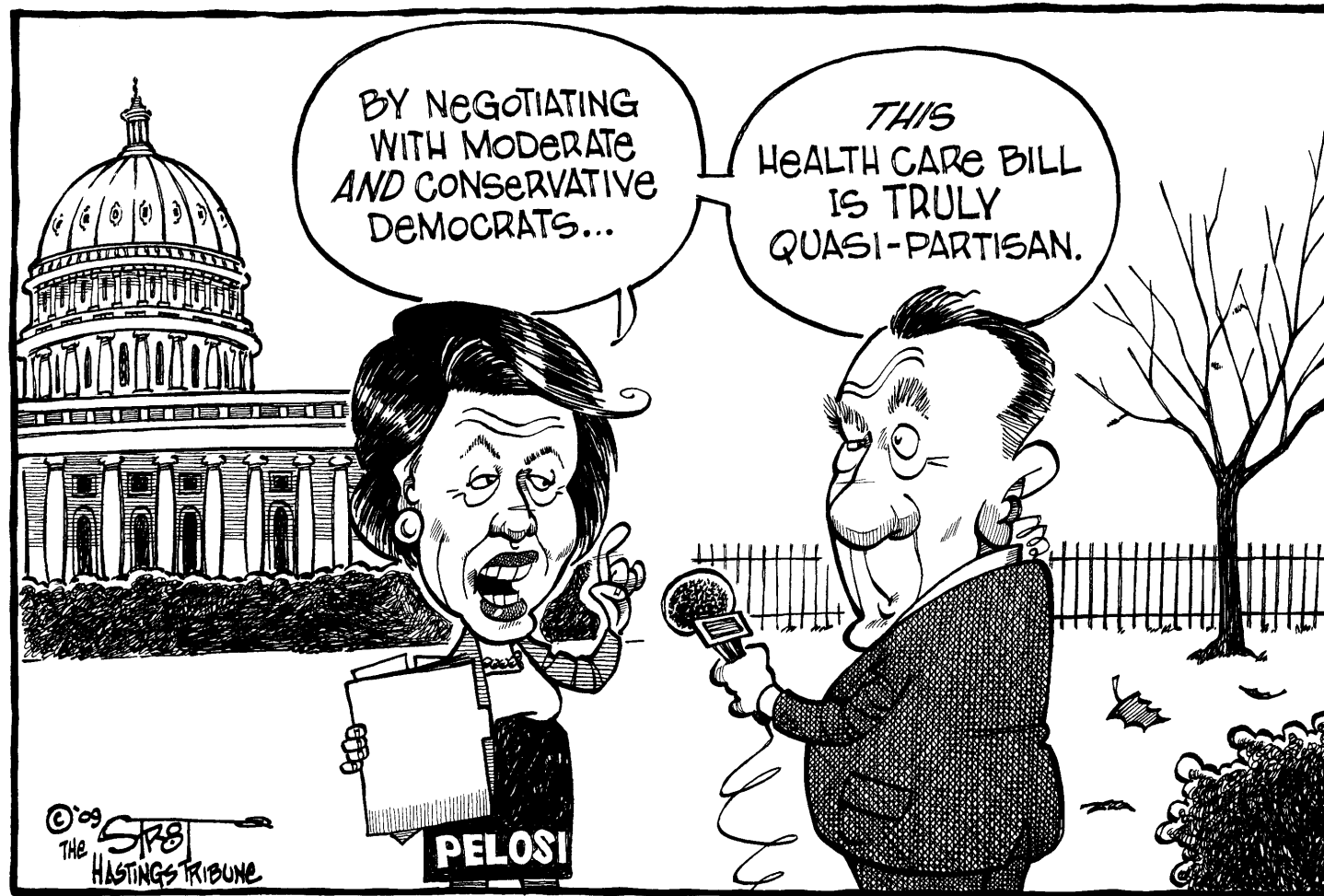
"There could be unknown side effects. Something could happen. But we think that is highly unlikely," says infectious disease and vaccine expert Mark Mulligan, MD, executive director of the Hope Clinic of the Emory Vaccine Center in Atlanta, GA.

We hope citizens, as they contemplate whether to get a shot of H1N1 vaccine, will listen to the experts. Should you still have doubts, just remember one thing.

Despite the air of uncertainty about the vaccine – which is natural, since it is new – one thing is known for certain. H1N1 may make you very ill. It may even kill you. The vaccine? Odds are that 1 or 2 people out of million may get a serious reaction.

Less than a million people live in South Dakota. The state's population has decreased by nine because of deaths caused by H1N1.

The odds are definitely favoring South Dakotans with the wisdom to not fear the H1N1 vaccine.



Reading the news leads to Phyllisosophical discussions

Phyllis is the kind of person who reads the national and international news.

Then she gets upset about things in Meckling, Timor, Bangladesh and points east and west.

At our house we worry about the possible extinction of whales and polar bears; will the Medicare money run out and what to do about international terrorists; does the Afghanistan army have enough bullets and who really controls the price of pork bellies!

I tried to tell Phyllis that there's nothing we can do about most of those monstrous problems so we shouldn't worry about them.

Her retort was: "If I could just talk to the president, I'd tell him a thing or two, and then maybe we'd get some action on the health bill, too."

"And just what kind of advice would you have for him?" I asked, knowing that her chances for an audience with Mr. Big were comparable to my winning the 100

meter dash at the Olympics.

"Well, first of all," she fumed, "I'd tell him to start listening to us plain folks a little more and not just to that same handful of bigwigs who get to Washington, DC, one way or another and then play musical chairs in government jobs for the rest of their lives."

"Then," she added (and I could see she was starting to warm up!) "I'd tell him to get some of our problems solved at home before we run around the world straightening out somebody else's closets."

"We've got bridges falling down, roads falling apart, farms disappearing, main street store windows boarded up, millions of double-dippers with their hands in the national cookie jar and some silly

idea that all the pornography doesn't have something to do with child abuse and divorce rates," she ranted.

"We've got to be good at home before we can act good some place else," she fairly shouted.

(Boy, I've really opened Pandora's box, I thought, but there was no stopping her now.)

"And another thing," she expounded, "take the weird farm program some dreamer is always coming up with. Every time they think up an artificial solution back there in the ivory towers, it messes up the natural flow of things."

"If the government really wants to help out, it could lend money to our little farm operators at the same 2 and 3 percent rates its charging over-

seas, and then use some of that horrendous foreign aid budget to figure out a way to feed a hungry world," she went on Phyllisosophically speaking.

"A farmer is happiest when he's producing without restrictions," she preached, "and if we could just figure out who is manipulating the market!"

"We've got enough of a gamble just with the weather," she growled, looking out over the under-water fields. "How can a farmer operate on the basis of hoping he'll be lucky on the day he takes his load to town? He'd probably do just as well to sell out and move to Las Vegas!"

I should have taken notes because before she got done, she'd reshaped our space program, jailed all the junkies, and had the delightful old passenger trains running again.

The more I thought of it, maybe she should have a chance to visit with the president after all.

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Bob Karolevitz
Writer At Large

Right side, left side, back or front?

Way back on the Epistle side of the sanctuary in the very last pew is where you'll find the Johnsons every Sunday. Since Don uses a walker, he sits near the exit with his wife, daughter and grandchildren at his side.

Up front on the Gospel side are the Andersons, behind them the Swansons. Travel straight back to the center of the church and you'll find the Larsons, next to the Larsons are the Smiths.

Behind the Smiths, the Bensons and clear in the rear on the Gospel side are the Gibsons.

My attention was first drawn to the territorial nature of where people sit in church some years ago on Good Friday. My congregation was producing a play that I wrote entitled "Marys Crossing." We all hopped the edgy Passion drama, which is written from the female perspective, would bring in a crowd of newcomers, and it did just that.

The night of the performance, dozens upon dozens of unfamiliar faces filed into the church, flushing the Johnsons, the Andersons and others out of their galvanized positions.

MyStory YourStory



Paula Damon
Columnist

Even the balcony was filled for the first time in decades.

Bernie, whose spot was taken, was miffed. "Hey, someone took my seat," he whispered to me.

"Yes, isn't that grand," I said, ever so pleased with the turn out. "Looks like you'll have to find to a new place tonight."

As I watched Bernie begrudgingly shuffle his way into the sanctuary, I considered the fixed places we assign ourselves and wondered what would happen if we moved around now and then.

I once knew a woman who left her church all because of the seating chart nature of the place.

"When I saw Linda's picture in the obituaries, I felt sad and mad at the same time," she fumed. "Linda always sat on the left side

and, of course, I always sat on the right. I knew her face, but I never learned her name, never once spoke to her," she continued with tears welling in a sideways glance, her lips pinching back grief.

"There's something wrong," she blurted mournfully. "We are silently segregating ourselves from one another and nothing is being done about it! That's not what church is supposed to be. It's just not the Christian thing to do, so I quit going."

I first experienced an antidote to such self-segregation at a Latino worship service.

During the "Sharing of the Peace," everyone got out of their seats and greeted each other in two processional circles that moved in opposite directions around the perimeter of the sanctuary.

Conscious of my own fixed place in church, I occasional-

ly force myself to sit on the other side. It is a different experience for me. At first, I feel out of place and a little uncomfortable.

But there in the front corner on the Epistle side, far from where I usually sit on Sunday morning, my circle widens. I shake hands with and speak to people for the first time. I hear new voices. I experience a new brand of fellowship without even leaving the building.

So I'm wondering, where do you sit in church?

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@u.net, follow her blog at www.my-story-your-story.blogspot.com <http://www.my-story-your-story.blogspot.com/> and find her on Facebook.

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- 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.

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