

## We can do better for the health of it

There's a new study out with conclusions that have become all too familiar: We residents of the Midwest could be healthier.

We'll talk more about that in a bit. But first, in the interest of full disclosure, a few things need to be mentioned.

The above conclusion is part of a study entitled "A Fragile Nation in Poor Health," released this week by TeleVox Software. It landed in my e-mail over the weekend.

I've never heard of TeleVox Software. After a bit of research, I've learned it is an Alabama-based company that markets communications services to dentists, physicians, utility companies, hospitals and small-business owners.

I have no idea what South Dakota health officials think of TeleVox, or its study. Officials at Health Literacy Missouri, however, have concluded that some of the study's findings shouldn't be discounted simply because it was commissioned by a company that sells communication software intended for the health industry.

"Though the TeleVox Health World Report may be criticized for being a marketing tool to support the company's software products, few would argue with the survey's actual findings," said Michelle Roberts, director of communications at Health Literacy Missouri, in a story published this week by the Columbia (MO) Daily Tribune.

Among the study highlights:

- Sixty-two percent of Midwesterners don't feel their overall personal health is in good shape.

- The Midwestern diet is filled with high-fat, high-calorie comfort foods and, as a result, the Midwest has extremely high rates of obesity.

- Roughly four out of five Midwesterners admit they don't follow treatment plans exactly as prescribed, and more than one-third said they could better follow those plans with encouragement from their doctors between visits.

Geni Alexander, public information officer for the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services, said, "We would be very careful basing" programs "strictly off that study" because it makes the case for technology that TeleVox sells.

But local health officials are not dismissing the finding that Midwesterners are overweight or that the study points to a need for greater health literacy.

The health literacy movement, aimed at making health information and interaction with physicians and health providers more understandable, is a main component of the Affordable Care and Patient Protection Act — generally known as the health care reform act.

In a somewhat bizarre coincidence, just as TeleVox released its report, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to decide the constitutionality of the health care reform law.

Oral arguments are likely to be held in late February or March, with a ruling by June, assuring the

### BETWEEN THE LINES



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blockbuster issue will become a hot-button political debate in a presidential election year. The high court agreed to hear two major questions: whether the law's key provision is unconstitutional, and if so, whether the entire law, with its 450 sections, must be scrapped.

I'm going to go out on a limb and conclude that TeleVox likely doesn't want to see the law repealed. It appears that much of the company's future business model is based on communication requirements between physicians and patients that seemingly are written into the legislation.

TeleVox's study, however, does point out some disturbing trends that are easily backed up by data available from the South Dakota Department of Health. We are known for our grit, determination and hard work (much of it physical) here on the Great Plains, leading one to easily believe we all should be the picture of good health in South Dakota.

We aren't. Our obesity rate is greater than the national average. And many of the poor diet, exercise and health habits that are becoming prevalent among a great number of South Dakota adults are being adopted by our younger generation.

We realize it's the holiday season — hardly the right time to try to talk about obesity and dieting. We know that you'll be sitting down to a big Thanksgiving meal in less than a week.

The customary launch of a pre-Christmas holiday baking blitz is likely just around the corner in your household, too.

There's always New Year's Day — the perfect time to resolve to do a bit better in all aspects of our lives.

It turns out that a study commissioned by a company hoping to sell software to health professionals has a bit of value to the general population. The study serves as a reminder, at least, that we could do better when it comes to taking care of ourselves and our families.

The same study that reveals our health shortcomings, and legislation from Washington, for that matter, are not a panacea, however. We're proud of our individualism here in the Midwest.

It turns out that this trait will best serve those of us who truly wish to improve our health.

### Guest Commentary:

## Thanksgiving: It's time, with thanks, to count our blessings

By Parker Knox

"When you're worried and you can't sleep," Irving Berlin wrote as the lyrics of one of his songs, "just count your blessings instead of sheep, and you'll fall asleep counting your blessings."

That thought crossed my mind again on a Saturday morning in October, a rare day with no wind, when the sun was out, the tree leaves were glorious, cross country runners clad in various colors were warming up on the course on the north side of Vermillion, high school bands in the distance were outside the DakotaDome warming up for a festival, and all — for an hour at least — was well with the world.

At Thanksgiving time for many years I've written a column for whoever would bother to read it. Since you have chosen to do so, let me say "Happy Thanksgiving." May you and yours find just as many things for which to be thankful this year as I have on my list:

Four perfect grandchildren, all of whom live in the same city now ...

bookstores ... Charlie Coyote ... warm pumpkin pie topped with Cool Whip ... the uniqueness of South Dakota where, no matter where you go, you can find somebody who knows somebody who knows you ... the hometown newspaper in the mailbox each week ... fellow walkers who cheerfully say "Hello" and "Good morning" as we pass on the sidewalks ... the Black Hills Playhouse ... the music of "Les Miserables" ... deviled eggs.

"Touch" 'em all, Justin Morneau" (or any other Twin who is healthy enough to be in the lineup) ... my hour with a morning cup of coffee over a copy of USA Today in the MUC ... the glorious sound of music in the renovated auditorium at Slagle Hall ... pumpkin bread ... the rush of seeing a car bearing a license plate from home ... memories of Duke, Queenie, Buppy, Tippy, Malcolm, Bud, Maggie, Oliver and all the other dogs who have graced my life ... homecoming parades ... the view out across the valley from West Main.

Four children who as adults have

become each other's strongest friends, defenders, protectors and supporters ... train whistles at night as the freights rumble through town down below the bluffs ... hot chocolate ... the scent of rain in the air ... Duke Blue Devils basketball ... a Tom & Jerry on a frosty holiday morning ... Minneapolis-St. Paul ... the first glimpse of the DakotaDome roof while coming down I-29 ... Octobers ... playoff baseball such as we had this year ... sweet potatoes smothered in marshmallows.

Easy crossword puzzles ... people who stop to watch Oliver stalk squirrels on the campus and then continue on their way smiling ... "I'll Be Home For Christmas" and the memories it evokes ... the talented and personable young men and women of the USD music department who welcome me into their midst each day ... cheerful supermarket workers we get to know on a first-name basis ... Summit League basketball tournaments ... Handel's "Messiah" ... summer baseball evenings ... strawberry shortcake.

Memories of Mom, Dad and Grandma Maggie amid regrets they never got to know my grandkids ... the Sound of USD marching band ... the Christmas trees in the Capitol Rotunda ... the ultimate tribute to an organist — a compliment from Jack Noble ... a surprise e-mail from someone from whom I haven't heard in a long time ... the military men and women on deployments and the supportive families keeping things going at home ... a harvest moon ... seeing the light in the tower of Old Main out my kitchen window ... a Louie Krogman 3-pointer to beat the buzzer.

"Free popcorn Fridays" at the MUC ... Garrison Keillor and "Prairie Home Companion" ... wind chimes ... the USD brass choir ... getting green lights on Cherry Street all the way through town ... turkey pot pies ... the ladies and guys at the public library ... the nervous energy of a vocal student as his or her recital time approaches ... my fellow surviving members of the OHS Class of '56 ... a penny on the sidewalk ... brownies ... South Dakota sunrises

and sunsets ... Wrigley Field and the Cubs, hopeless as they may be.

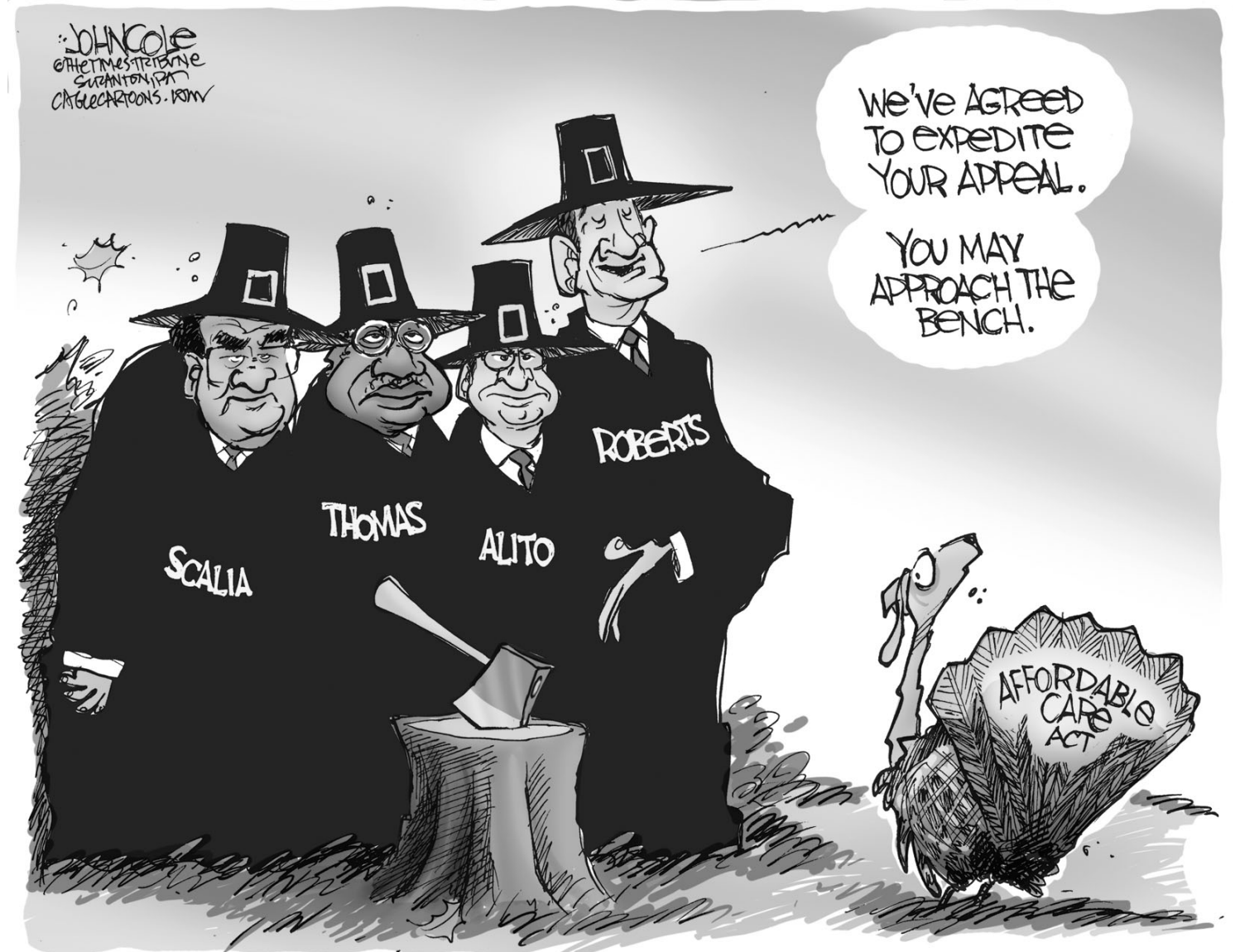
Sunday mornings from their early quiet time to powerful hymns, choir anthems and messages to coffee and conversation afterward ... peanut butter and jelly sandwiches ... Bob Bowker and his cronies on "Tanager" radio broadcasts ... the Paradise Fears boys ... hot apple cider ... the first blooming flowers in the spring ... the first sight of the lights of Pierre from 15 miles out ... the sun streaming through stained-glass windows ... riding the Light Rail downtown to a Twins or Vikings game ... cross country meets.

My daily hour with the USD opera class ... families together at a Christmas Eve service ... Greg Merrigan's signature voice at USD games and the state track meets ... hot dogs on a grill ... a university president who rolls down his car window to talk about one's dog ... rhubarb in any form ... the exhilaration of Game Day at USD — the tailgating and the band's arrival, the pre-game show, the howl of the coyotes and the roar of the

motorcycles, the third-down alarm bells and the band's fight songs, Will Powell's astounding receptions, and "that's another Coyote first down!" ... public servants who live the part.

The College World Series ... the sense of family that pervades the Vermillion Community Theatre cast each summer ... friends who ask "How are you?" and really want to know the answer ... shuffling through leaves while strolling across campus ... a phone call from one of the kids or a friend to reassure me they arrived there safely ... Washington, D.C. ... sing-alongs of musical theater music ... Nicholas Sparks' latest book ... the pizza guy's knock on the door ... relaxing with friends on a rare night out somewhere downtown ... the "Skol, Vikings" fight song and those rare occasions we get to sing it.

Thornton Wilder said, "We can be said to be alive only in those moments when our hearts are conscious of our treasures." May we be aware of ours not only on Thanksgiving Day but each day beyond as well.



## Penn State's tragic fall from grace

"The difference between being healthy and unhealthy is all about boundaries."

— Salvador Minuchin

Growing up, there was a code of silence in our household about anything bad: wrongdoings, mistakes, mishaps, physical and mental illnesses. Call them what you will, not a word was spoken.

We found ourselves hushed and shushed by speechless glances, downcast frowns and raised eyebrows. We were forced to read the faces of our elders in order to map our own explanations for all sorts of misgivings.

The same was true as we grew into adulthood. Good luck trying to get my father to discuss the ills of the church or the wrongdoings of government. He'd shrug his shoulders, slowly turn and walk away. Not a word.

I think I know why Dad was this way, for when we speak about failures, we acknowledge vulnerabilities and weaknesses of something we hold in high esteem and experience a great, sometimes tragic sense of loss.

As I watch the Penn State child sex abuse scandal unfold, I'd rather not talk about it. I wish it were not true. I want it to go away. Maybe if I keep silent, I can hold onto some of my most significant childhood memories.

Anyone who knows me is aware that I'm very proud that I practically grew up on the Penn State campus. My birthplace of Phillipsburg, Penn., is only a hop, skip and a jump from State College.

Our Sunday drives were to Happy Valley. There among ivy-covered brick and mortar of academia, my parents, five siblings and I would roam the massive pastoral campus, spanning many city blocks. We'd stop at the creamery for the most wonderful, freshly made ice cream

and later pour over fishery bays, watching minnows scramble for food.

Yes, it is painful for me to discuss the tragedy of this unfolding story. I am battling the notion that if I talk about these ills, I will lose the cherished ideals of that place way back when.

I know that silence is not the answer. In the case of any type of abuse, silence is toxic, and in order to break the mold, I must talk.

In the case of Penn State and the under reporting or non-reporting of the alleged child sex abuse committed by former assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky, it is clear that many boundaries were violated. It boggles my mind that the powers to be at Penn State had that much power.

We have become a society with diminishing boundaries, where reputations of institutions of commerce, government or education are more important than the individual. We are a materialistic culture of what's mine is mine and what's yours is also mine.

I want to believe that we can turn things around by teaching our children to be aware of boundaries and respect them. Experts say that setting clear boundaries helps boost children's self-esteem and teaches them the difference between right and wrong. Here's how:

- Be clear about healthy and unhealthy boundaries in relationships and make sure your children know the difference.
- Show children how to solve problems by your example and role play how to

discuss them.

- Read your children books about boundaries, such as "Doing and Being Your Best: The Boundaries and Expectations Assets" by Pamela Espeland and Elizabeth Verdict

- Teach children what happens when people don't have boundaries.

- Spend regularly scheduled time alone with each of your children, reinforcing they have someone safe to turn to.

- Hold family meetings, giving each child a chance to express his/her successes, failures, questions and concerns. Children who feel as if they have a voice are more likely to follow rules and adhere to boundaries.

- Show your children their opinions matter.

In the case of the many boundaries that were breached at Penn State, I really want to shove it under the rug, but I must be honest and talk about it.

At this writing, five investigations, nine victims and counting, this sad and shocking scandal is proof positive of the horrific consequences of boundary neglect, boundary disrespect, boundary erosion and boundary abuse.

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A resident of Southeast South Dakota, Paula Bosco Damon is a national award-winning columnist. Her writing has won first-place in competitions of the National Federation of Press Women, South Dakota Press Women and Iowa Press Women. In the 2009, 2010 and 2011 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contests, her columns have earned eight first-place awards. To contact Paula, email [boscodamon.paula@gmail.com](mailto:boscodamon.paula@gmail.com), follow her blog at [my-story-your-story.blogspot.com](http://my-story-your-story.blogspot.com) and find her on FaceBook.

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