

The American public deserves greater access to legislative measures

GUEST COMMENTARY

By Senator John Thune

When I visit communities throughout our state, I am always proud of the attention that South Dakotans pay to the national issues that are being debated in Congress. Similarly, the letters, phone calls, and emails to my office show that South Dakotans are very engaged in the discussion about the future direction of our nation. As an elected representative, I believe that Members of Congress not only have a duty to provide the most accurate information to constituents, but also to be familiar with the details of major legislation.

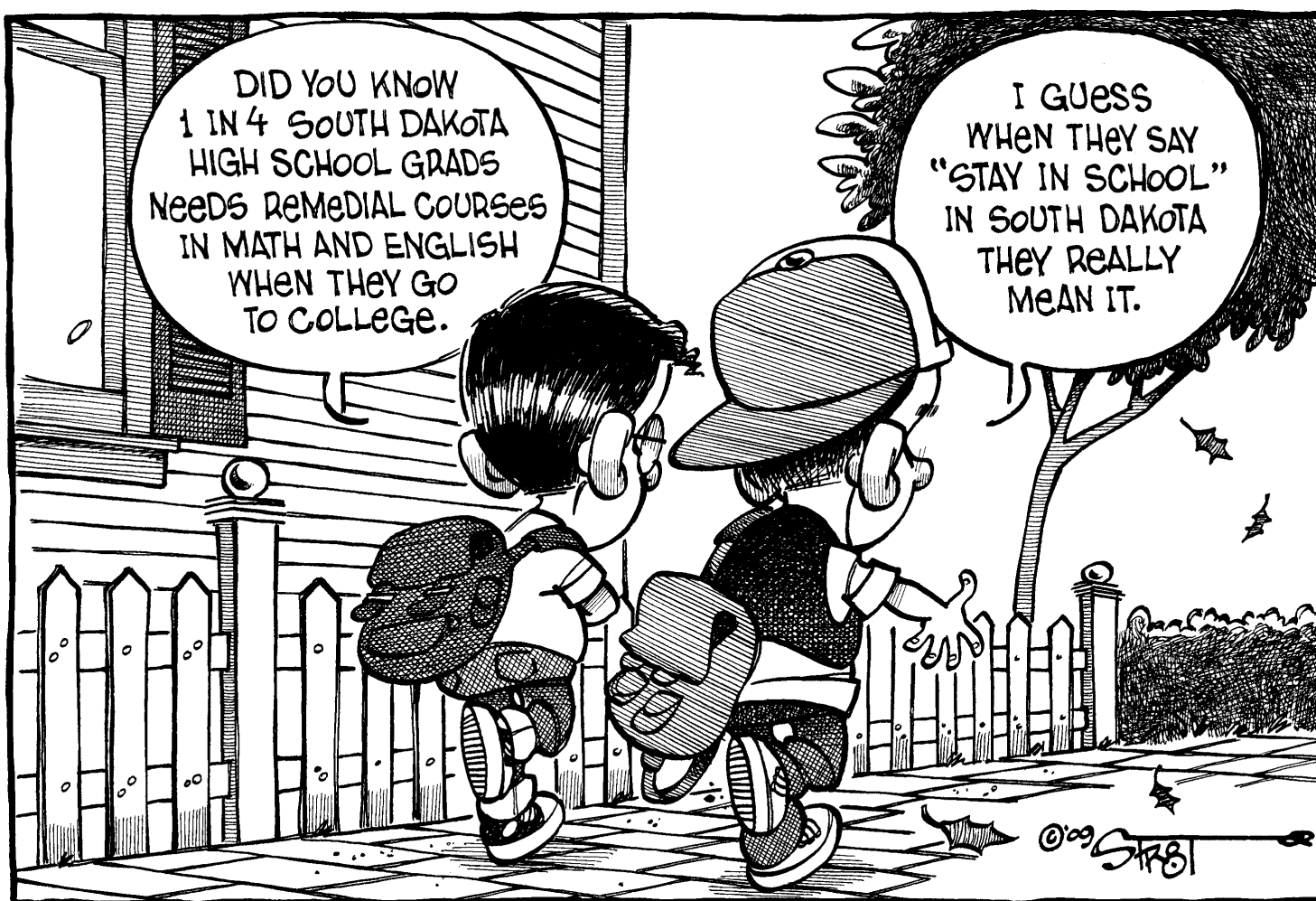
I support an effort currently underway to change the U.S. Senate Rules so that all legislation is available online for at least 72 hours before it is considered by any Senate committee or debated on the Senate floor. The change would also require that any legislation's cost estimate from the Congressional Budget Office be posted along with the text of the legislation. Unfortunately, this common sense idea is meeting strong resistance. Amazingly, when the Senate Finance committee considered their health care bill earlier this month, the Democrats on the Committee defeated an amendment by a single vote that would have required greater public transparency.

When the Senate was out of session this past August, I traveled extensively throughout South Dakota, meeting with people in coffee shops and places of business. I also hosted town hall meetings in Watertown, Aberdeen, Huron, and Rapid City. At both these informal visits and town hall meetings, I heard from South Dakotans who are discouraged by the complexity of the legislative process and its lack of transparency – including how the Democrat majority has rushed to pass measures such as the \$787 billion Stimulus bill and the controversial Cap and Trade bill in the House of Representatives.

People are justifiably frustrated with the sad reality that in a growing number of instances, Members of Congress do not have adequate time to review the details of legislation before votes. While this is a much larger problem in the House of Representatives because the majority party can rush through measures without substantive debate, the Senate is less prone to such tactics. Nonetheless, due to the fact that major pieces of legislation, such as the health care reform bill, are being crafted behind closed doors, I support changing the Senate Rules so that bills would be posted online could alleviate some of these problems.

Many South Dakotans remember how the \$787 billion economic stimulus bill was rushed through Congress before many Members of Congress, let alone the American people, could fully understand all that the bill contained. There is justifiable concern that a health care reform bill could be similarly rushed through. This style of legislating does a disservice to Members of Congress and dangerously undermines the principles of our representative republic.

We are blessed to live in an age where technology allows for new levels of government transparency and openness. Still, it appears some elected representatives are not concerned with the public's ability to read legislation before it is considered and voted on, let alone the ability of most Members of Congress to be familiar with it. Posting legislative language and Congressional Budget Office cost estimates online would be a simple change that Congress could make to ensure more transparency and inspire more confidence among the American people. Major issues like health care reform, the regulation of greenhouse gasses, and our nation's budget fiscal are too important to be debated in the dark.



Little 'crick' was all-season recreation area

*Oh barefoot boy
With sun-tanned cheek,
You found your joy
In yonder creek.*

Every boy should have a creek in his life!

For me it was a nondescript little stream which still bubbles up from northwest of our town and eventually winds up in the Missouri River.

We never called it "creek" in our day. It was always "crick" – and it was our substitute for computer games which are seemingly necessary to pacify the kids of the later generation.

I think of it especially in the spring but it was an all-season recreation area for me



Bob Karolevitz

Writer At Large

and my buddies in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Back then the creek contained a few holes deep enough so you could actually fish with a cane pole, hook and bobber. We didn't catch much: an occasional bullhead or maybe a worthless sucker now and then.

Mostly though we seined barefooted in the shallow, slow-moving stream.

I remember once when a buddy and I scooped up a whole washtub full of tadpoles, minnows and crawdads.

I don't know why we did it. They all died and they smelled a lot too before wiser adults ordered us to dump them out for the chickens. That was before the environmental controls were enforced.

Folks threw garbage over

the banks, and there were tin cans and broken bottles in the muddy bottom to gash the feet of unsuspecting shoeless waders.

Why we didn't all die of typhoid and other dread diseases, I'll never know!

Mothers were not particularly happy about our splashing around in the polluted creek, and sometimes we disregarded strict orders to stay out of it.

Speaking of that tub full of dead and stinky fish – the chickens we fed them to did not die of that great Frank Buck, Bring 'em Back Alive Adventure!

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I'm giving it all away - the rest of the story

The week after I signed up to be an organ donor, a letter came in the mail from the Department of Public Safety.

Fingering the thick envelope, I thought it must be a big thank you with some sort of certificate of appreciation.

Eager to open it, I wondered aloud, "Hm-mm, maybe I am the one-hundredth donor this month and I've won the grand prize."

Since I decided to give away all my organs, I had been floating on a cloud of satisfaction, knowing that I could help as many as 60 people.

When my number is up, maybe, just maybe, one of the 16 who die every day waiting for an organ transplant will live.

Wow, did donating my organs make me a wonderful person or what?

I'm no Mother Theresa, but definitely a qualifier for one of the lesser saints. I could see it in lights: "The deceased Paula Bosco Damon enters candidacy for sainthood." Talk about helping others. It doesn't get any better than this.

In my usual fashion of exuberance over getting real mail in a real envelope that's glued shut, I ripped that baby open.

As I quickly read the header "Department of Public Safety, 118 W. Capitol, Pierre, South Dakota 57501-2000," I totally expected praise for my selfless

MyStory YourStory



Paula Damon

Columnist

act of generosity.

The letter reads...

Dear Ms. Damon:
Thank you for sending your Organ and Tissue Donor Registry Form. In checking it, I noticed that you had put your doctor's name in the "Donor's Name" field.

Therefore, I am returning the Form to you, along with a new Form so that you may enter the correct information and return it to me.

Thank you! If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,
Geneva Barkley

In disbelief, I flipped to the next page and quickly scanned my completed Form. At the bottom, Geneva marked with a yellow highlighter exactly where I had screwed up. The Form reads "Donor's Name," not "Doctor's Name!"

I could not believe it! I had donated my doctor's organs, every last one of them, along with all of his tissue without

even knowing it!

I donated his heart and heart valves, his lungs and liver, his kidneys and pancreas, his intestines and corneas, even his skin and bones, and I didn't even ask him.

As every ounce of pride drained out of me, I felt dejected, deflated and disappointed by my silly mistake. I tried to laugh it off – ha, ha, ha. I laughed some more, ha, ha, ha, but I felt so embarrassed. Way to go, Paula.

I had to quickly blame my mistake on something. My eyestrain! That's it! My job as a writer and editor made me donate my doctor's organs. Plus, who in the world could read that teeny-weeny 10-point-size font on the Form.

I couldn't find one of my gazillion pairs of reading glasses and filled it out in a blur. I was so distracted by CNN that it's a wonder I didn't donate Wolf Blitzer's organs.

Prior to receiving this piece of news, I had been strutting around with an interior glow, and outwardly, I was clipping

along with gleeful lilt in my step.

Similar to being baptized, confirmed and married, by agreeing to devote my organs had changed me in an indefinable way.

I have learned in life, and in golf, that a do-over can be healthy for your game. So I put on my reading glasses, got out my 4-inch diameter, 3-X power magnifying glass, filled out the Form and mailed it, again. Now, I thought, this time I hope it's official.

(For more information about organ donation, please call 1-888-5-DONATE or 1-888-5-366-2833, or visit www.organdonor.gov.)

Paula Damon. 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@iu.net, follow her blog at www.my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on Facebook.

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Stimulus effective for South Dakota

By U.S. Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD)

Some have argued that the stimulus legislation has been ineffective in helping to revive our economy. That outlook ignores the true strengths of the legislation – it cut taxes for the middle class, invested in our infrastructure and spurred job creation during the worst recession since the Great Depression. Over time, it has brought important funding home to keep teachers in schools, bridge the gap in Medicaid and fund law enforcement projects, including keeping cops on the job. We have already seen results across our state.

In mid-October, South Dakota submitted its first quarterly report to the federal government on stimulus spending. Through September, the state already spent \$219 million of an estimated \$632 million in federal stimulus funding South Dakota has received and may use over a three-year period. This has allowed our state to keep running smoothly as tax revenues dwindled and the economy slowed. The governor's office also reports that \$132 million will be spent on public assistance programs and \$23 million for public safety.

According to the report, a total of \$181 million will be spent for education in South Dakota. Already, funding has kept teachers in our classrooms and will help fund construc-

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tion projects in at least a dozen of South Dakota's school districts. That put districts, from Aberdeen to Mitchell to Vermillion, in a position to continue infrastructure upgrades that may have otherwise fallen behind.

Organizations like the Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota received nearly a half a million dollars from one grant alone to expand mentoring programs for at-risk youths. That is in addition to the millions that have also been provided to our reservations to continue the successful Edward Byrne program, which funds crime fighting programs and makes communities safer.

At roughly the same time the state's stimulus report was released, the South Dakota Energy Office received a grant of more than \$23 million to install more efficient lighting, windows and furnaces in state buildings in Pierre and beyond. According to local officials, this funding alone will create 326 jobs and save 39 employees from losing their paycheck. That is no small achievement in a state the size of ours.

In a rural state, access to quality medical care is crucial. The Recovery Act has increased

staff and expanded services at facilities in Fort Pierre, Isabel, Rapid City and Sioux Falls, as well as funding for a new Indian Health Service hospital for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. We're also on track to receive more than a hundred million dollars in stimulus funding for our Medicaid program, which will help meet demand during this trying time.

The stimulus has ensured that water projects like Lewis and Clark, which received \$56 million; Mni Wiconi, \$20 million; and Perkins County, \$4 million, can move forward despite this economic downturn. That's on top of annual appropriations I helped secure to keep these projects on track.

This long list is just the start of how the stimulus bill has touched every corner of our state.

No one has suggested that turning the economy around was going to happen overnight. This recession has proven to be longer and deeper than many expected, and reforms still needed within the financial services sector. Much of the stimulus funding is still entering the economy, so its impact is not yet being fully felt. Nonetheless, it is clear that the stimulus is putting South Dakotans to work and making the kind of investments that are vital to our state's economic growth.

LETTERS TO THE 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 350 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, P.O. Box 357, Vermillion, SD 57069, or e-mail us at david.lias@plaintalk.net.

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