

# City should begin mulling texting ban

Last February, I wrote about my experience following a Tanager boys' basketball game in the Vermillion High School gymnasium. After the game, I joined a stream of people of all ages that began making their way through the school commons to the exit leading to the parking lot.

Hours before, the janitor had cleared the commons of tables. We all had a wide-open space to walk across to get to the door. I followed a high school student who took advantage of the lack of obstacles. She opened her cell phone and began texting.

I was a bit jealous of her. Her fingers flew; she certainly seemed adept at multi-tasking as she walked, concentrating on punching out an electronic message as she bobbed and weaved along with the rest of us as we streamed toward the exit.

Everything was going smoothly. And then someone who had been holding one of the outer doors open released his grip on the door so he could step outside.

The door began to swing shut. The high schooler walking in front of me was so focused on texting that she walked right into the door.

She stepped back, perplexed for just a moment, trying to figure out what happened. If she was physically hurt, or if her pride took a momentary beating, it didn't show.

She simply moved on. And, while cringing, I internally expressed a silent wish that she wouldn't be getting behind the wheel of a car in the parking lot. Or that she took driving more seriously than walking. Or both.

Texting while driving has grown to be an even more cringe-worthy topic today in South Dakota. What some people have been fearing for some time has become reality.

South Dakotans no longer have to wonder if texting while driving may cause a fatality accident in our fair state. The evidence is beginning to build.

About two years ago a Mitchell man was stopped on his motorcycle behind two other vehicles at a state Highway 38 construction site a few miles east of that city. He was fatally struck from behind by a pickup, and it was later discovered the driver of the pickup had received and read a text message around the time of the crash.

A man accused last July of fatally injuring a motorcyclist while he was speeding and texting in Sioux Falls is facing manslaughter charges.

Earlier this month, in action no doubt inspired by that tragic accident, the Sioux Falls City Council approved an ordinance that bans texting while driving in the city. The law kicks in at the end of September, meaning police can soon pull over drivers

for texting while operating a motor vehicle. It's a ticket that carries a \$200 fine, even for a first offense.

Mitchell is now considering implementing a similar ban. As we watch somewhat from afar, we encourage the Vermillion City Council to consider the possibility of one day introducing a similar ordinance

that bans texting while driving within city limits.

Few people, if any, encourage texting while driving. The debate centers more around whether it is the government's role to ban it or a personal responsibility of the driver not to do it and whether police can adequately enforce it.

It is just such a debate that has stalled efforts in the last few years by the South Dakota Legislature to ban texting while driving statewide. A Canton legislator introduced a bill calling for a ban on texting and driving during the 2012 legislative session.

It didn't survive. A similar bill introduced by Sen. Eldon Nygaard in 2011 also ultimately failed to gain enough support.

Jonathan Adkins, a spokesman for the Governors Highway Safety Association, notes that a recent study by the association discovered, among many things, that reading or writing a text message behind the wheel more than doubles a driver's reaction time.

Said Adkins, "Texting while driving is dangerous and drivers really don't have any business texting while driving; no text is that important."

We realize that continued arguments about the difficulty of enforcement may make it impossible for state lawmakers to pass a texting ban.

Sioux Falls, however, will soon offer South Dakotans concrete evidence concerning the effectiveness of such a ban. If Mitchell follows suit, more facts can be gathered.

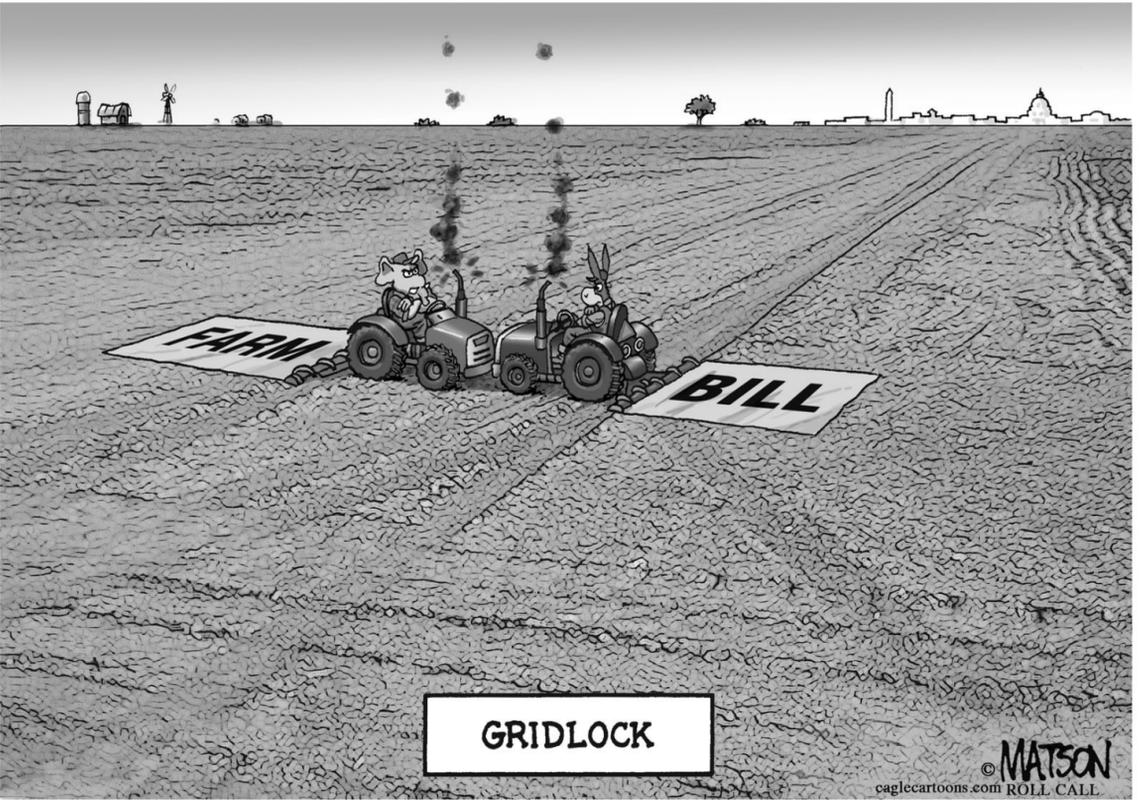
We encourage Vermillion city leaders to keep a close watch on what's happening in Sioux Falls, and perhaps, eventually, Mitchell.

If hard data shows that a texting ban can realistically make traveling on streets and highways safer, we hope our

**BETWEEN THE LINES**



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# A little bit of this, a little bit of that

Sometimes our thoughts are comprised of a little bit of this and a little bit of that. Nothing big or major is going on. No big ideas. Just minor stuff, seemingly inconsequentially strung together sort of like this...

A few months ago I thought I was squirrel-proofing my apple tree when I hung disposable pie tins on the branches. A lot of good that did. Given relentless squirrels and wind, my tree once loaded down with apples barely provided for one small apple crisp. Not only that, now the sound of those darn aluminum pie plates knocking in the wind is driving me crazy.

When we were teenagers, we would describe our mixed emotions with phrases, like "I'm happy sad" or "I'm up and down" or "I'm feeling out of sorts." Have you noticed the way young people describe their feelings these days? Listen closely and you'll hear crossover language from the internet.

In web-speak, forward slashes "/" and backward slashes "\," along with other symbols, identify locations or addresses.

Today, the slash has totally replaced the use of conjunctions to make statements that sound like this: "I'm happy-slash-sad-slash-mad." In web language, the same statement appears like this: "I'm happy/sad/mad."

Speaking of our use of the language, we've lost our bearings when it comes to adjectives. Instead, we are inventing new easy words as we go. The other night on a fashion reality show, a judge described a long flowing dress with an empire waist as being "too pageanty," as in beauty

pageant. There's more. I've heard people describe food as being too mustardy, too ketchupy and too oniony. Or perhaps we're becoming too couch potatoey.

A couch potato is one thing I've never been called. In fact, I made this list of things I love to do that most people would rather put off: I love to do housework, cook from scratch and do dishes. I look forward to mending, sewing and hemming skirts and trousers. I'm entertained by mowing grass, racking leaves and trimming bushes. I get big satisfaction from washing the windows, doing the laundry and scrubbing the toilets. I work hard to sweep corners, cobwebs and closets. I better stop here; otherwise, some might describe this column as too "listy."

I don't mind lists. They serve a purpose. My list for addresses of family and friends is a prized possession. When I can't find it, I start to twitch. Over the years, I've revised it and created new ones, but I have never thrown away the originals.

Years ago, I kept addresses in an address book. People don't use address books anymore, mainly because email and cell phones have rendered correspondence through the U.S. Post Service pretty near obsolete.

I'm sure some of you still have ancient dog-eared address books stuffed away in a drawer or next to your rotary phone. These days, I keep addresses on an excel spreadsheet, which replaced my book, which I know is here somewhere, but can't seem to find it. I'm still looking, not because I need to – I want to.

It's the closest thing I have to a family tree. Inside its worn and wrinkled pages, are penciled names, addresses, birthdays, anniversaries for grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, distant relatives, pastors, church members, friends and neighbors.

Old timey address books are relics to be cherished for their historical time lines, revealing trails of friendships, travels and services.

Address books hold more than simply names and numbers for important people and places in our lives. They are our compasses locating where we have been, publicizing our connections and revealing where we are headed.

I must admit that I am feeling unsettled-slash-sad-slash-hopeful over my lost address book. I'm still searching, because at the risk of sounding too drama queeny, it's got to be here somewhere.

2012 © Copyright Paula Damon. 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, follow her blog at my-story-your-story@blogspot.com and find her on Facebook.

**MY STORY YOUR STORY**



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Guest Commentary:

## South Dakota noted as 'Best-Run State'

**By Gov. Dennis Daugaard**

South Dakota recently made the cover of Barron's, the Dow Jones financial weekly, as the best-run state in the nation. Our state earned the top spot due to our low debt and responsible pension funding compared to our Gross Domestic Product. This is great news and a reflection on governors and legislatures, long before me, who understood the importance of debt avoidance, sound financial decisions, and making only commitments that can be kept.

Low Debt: In South Dakota, we have no general obligation debt and only a small amount of legal authority debt. While almost all states have balanced budget requirements in their constitutions or laws, many create the illusion of balance by borrowing funds, keeping highly leveraged agencies off the books, or tapping the proceeds from the sale of state assets. From California to Greece to Washington, D.C., governments are now realizing the consequences of poor fiscal management. Avoiding those bad practices, South Dakota has demonstrated fiscal responsibility.

Pension Management: Underfunded public pensions are another symptom of poor state management. All too often,

governments defer or only partially meet their obligations to pay into public pensions, or they make unrealistic growth projections that create the illusion of stability. In contrast, South Dakota has maintained its pension fund integrity by faithfully depositing necessary monies and by regularly revising projections to reflect changing realities.

In 2011, South Dakota balanced the state government budget – truly balanced the budget – without raising taxes. That action did not result in the favorable Barron's article, but it sustained past patterns of responsible money management that put South Dakota on that front cover.

It is not preordained that South Dakota will always be strong, or prosperous, or free. It is the obligation of every generation to secure those blessings for the generation to come. If we ever fail – if we allow our state to be ensnared in a pattern of entitlement and debt – it will be because we forgot these core values that have well served us for so long.

As your governor, I pledge to never lose sight of those values that keep our state strong and illuminate for our nation the pathway forward.

The Associated Press  
Rapid City Journal. Sept. 13, 2012  
**Return of sacred site a good thing**

So much is still unknown — and so many questions remain unanswered — about the potential sale of nearly 2,000 acres of Black Hills prairie to the Native American nation that considers it sacred.

According to published reports, Margaret and Leonard Reynolds, the owners of the high meadow grasslands near Deerfield Reservoir deep in the Black Hills, have accepted an earnest deposit and a \$9 million bid from the Rosebud Sioux Tribe for land that the Sioux know as Pe' Sla (pronounced pay-shlaw) and other inhabitants call Reynolds Prairie. Newly elected RST President Cyril Scott said recently that a \$900,000 deposit has been made and the remaining \$8.1 million payment is due in November. That agreement ended a planned auction that would have subdivided the land for sale to private individuals.

Who would own it, how it would be managed and where the remaining purchase funds will come from remain unclear at this point.

But there is one thing that is certain: If the land can be successfully returned to the Lakota nation, which considers it the sacred site of the Lakota creation story, and successfully managed once it is, then the

best interests of both the Great Sioux Nation, the land itself and people everywhere will have been served.

We're pleased to see the tribe and other Native organizations work together to make this dream a reality for all Native Americans. About 250 Native Americans recently rallied in Rapid City to support the purchase, while news of the pending auction, its cancellation and the last-minute efforts by tribes to buy the land stirred passions worldwide. Organizers said small donations of \$5 and \$10 flooded in from as far away as Russia and closer to home, as well, from people who want to see the land preserved for ceremonial and spiritual purposes.

We trust the Rosebud Sioux Tribe and others are sincere in their desire to manage Pe Sla for those purposes.

Additionally, we expect that all Black Hills residents and tourists will benefit from not seeing the Reynolds Prairie acreage subdivided and sold off as individual home sites to private individuals.

Development of that kind would denigrate the beautiful, sweeping vistas of that high meadow country, even for people who have no connection to the Lakota creation story. The benefits of keeping the land undeveloped and in its natural state benefits us all, no matter what your

Watertown Public Opinion. Sept. 11, 2012  
**Preserving retirement system's viability**

The South Dakota Retirement System's board of trustees recently began talks to consider making changes in the state's retirement system. The trustees are considering the changes because the system's benefits are overly generous, especially for early retirees, and the State Investment Council isn't able to produce the earnings necessary to keep the system in financial balance.

One change has already been made. Trustees adopted a lower annual target for rate of return on investments. Effective July 1, 2013, the target will be reduced to 7.25 percent from the current 7.75 percent. The 7.25 percent would be used for the next five years, then move to 7.5 percent in 2018. What that boils down to is trustees believe earnings expectations will be lower for the next few years and that means benefits and expenses will have to be reduced. Suggestions to accomplish that include raising the normal retirement age to 67, raising the early retirement age to 57 and adding five years to the formula for determining eligibility for special early retirement, so that a person would need a combination equaling 90 years in age and years of service instead of the current 85.

Given the problems nationwide with government pension programs, South Dakota's system is in pretty good shape. Trustees want to make these changes to head off problems in the future, based on overly optimistic return percentages. That gives us comfort knowing the system will continue to be supported by those investing each month instead of coming to the Legislature's general fund and begging for a bailout from all taxpayers.

Looking at the state retirement system two things become obvious. First, increasing the retirement age means people/pensioners drawing on the system are living longer. That, in turn, means more money needs to be pumped into the system, both from those working and from fund investments, to ensure adequate funding so the pension system can meet its obligations.

South Dakota's public pension system has more than 74,000 members and their families. To make sure their future needs are met, the system has to take steps periodically to make sure it will have the money on hand to meet those obligations. The goal of the system is to be self-sustaining and that's the way it should be. The last thing anyone wants to see is the taxpayers having to pitch in to the keep the system afloat, as what's happening in numerous states across the country.