

# OPINION

OUR VIEW

## MNsure deadline is looming

Like it or not, the need for some form of health insurance in our nation is a reality. Minnesotans who don't have insurance and fail to enroll through MNsure, the state's health insurance exchange, by 11:59 p.m. Monday face federal tax penalties.

Whether MNsure, an offshoot of the Affordable Care Act known as ObamaCare, is a good thing or another infringement by our federal government, Minnesotans who do not have any form of health insurance ought to pay attention to this deadline.

Some may look at joining with the more than 148,000 other Minnesotans who have already enrolled as risking their health and financial future should they face a major injury or illness.

Others may say it's worth enrolling to avoid a penalty of \$95 or up to 1 percent of their total household income — whichever is greater.

MNsure officials reported, as of Wednesday, total enrollment has topped 148,000. That compares with more than 136,700 reported Monday when the exchange announced it had surpassed its sign-up goal of 135,000. A major reason for the

jump is a large batch of paper applications for private plans were just added to the count.

The new numbers compiled for MNsure's board of directors Tuesday include more than 41,000 enrollments in private insurance plans and more than 104,000 for the public Medicaid and MinnesotaCare plans.

The beginning months of the program brought much frustration to people attempting to access the exchange's offerings. The website — an online marketplace — had significant issues, which officials say have been stabilized. MNsure officials have doubled the staff at the call center since December. Call wait times have dropped from a peak of more than one hour to much lower averages in this final week before the enrollment deadline, officials say. But they say with many still expected to enroll, call wait times may again increase.

Again, like it or not, having some form of health insurance is a requirement in our nation. We urge eligible Minnesotans to save themselves some frustration, and possibly money, and enroll as soon as possible prior to Monday's deadline.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Addiction, disease, death, and loss

**To the editor,**  
I am inspired daily by people who overcome the odds of survival from addiction, disease, death, and loss.

Most recently, a friend of mine sent me an article published in the Washington Post about addiction and loss, written by a neighbor and member of our community, Kris Lessard. It is about the recent loss of her son to addiction. I applaud Kris for speaking out. So many of us brush it under the rug, are ashamed and embarrassed, and even deny that it exists.

The addiction to drugs and alcohol is the most prevalent and fast spreading disease (in my opinion) that there is today, taking the lives of our children, young adults, teachers, students, nurses, lawyers, and yes, even doctors; among thousands of others in every walk of life.

Addiction is not fussy; it will take anyone in its path

and usually wins. We as a community, as concerned citizens, not just of International Falls but of the world, need to stand up, speak up, and start fighting this insidious disease before it devours more of our own, leaving in its wake sadness, loss, unending grief, destruction and devastation to ourselves and society.

There is no cure for addiction, but there is recovery in a 12-step program that is available almost anywhere in the world. I consider myself an ongoing work in progress in this program. I have been blessed with five years of joyful recovery this March 28. This program works. There are so many of us out there living in recovery that would welcome the chance to help anyone that is suffering. It is part of our duty as citizens of this earth and for having received the gift of recovery.

Education, education, education! We need to get the word out there. There is help and there is no shame in asking. The only shame is to lose another life because we were afraid to ask for help.

I hope that if you know someone who needs this help you won't hesitate to seek it. Ask your ministers, social services, find meetings in the newspaper, ask someone that you know who is in recovery. There are many avenues to take.

I plead with every one of you — if you know someone that needs help, seek education, advice, and knowledge from those who have it before we all lose another life to addiction.

Each human being is special, unique, and deserves health, happiness, and a good life. Let's help each other find it.

**Cynthia J. Warren  
International Falls, MN**

## Let taxpayers vote on Donahue property

**To the editor,**  
The city council and Economic Development Authority — which are the same anyway, made up of the same people — they will waste the taxpayers money on the Donahue property before they admit they are wrong.

If it goes through it will start off open to the public and when the vandalism starts — and it will — then it will be gated off,

closed to the public, and the town will have another Clark's Park, another Second Bridge Park. Shut down, closed, waste of money.

All the broken water mains and frozen sewer pipes all over town — that's where the money should be spent. If you want the truth on what the majority of the citizens think and want when it comes to the Donahue property, let

the taxpayers vote on the Donahue property. That's what's right and that's what's fair. Seeing that the taxpayers are footing the bill.

And why is it every time there's a decision to be made they hire someone from out of town to do their thinking for them? Shop local. Keep the money local.

**Darren Wallen  
International Falls, MN**

## WHAT OTHERS SAY

### For safer schools, antibullying law must be strengthened

One man said he grew up in a large, poor family and was bullied at school because of how he looked. He added that his own children have been teased and harassed for different reasons.

A teenager recalled considering suicide after relentless bullying about his race and transgender identification at his high school. And a grieving mother spoke emotionally about her 12-year-old son, who took his own life after being bullied.

Those and other stories emerged during a Senate hearing last week on proposed antibullying legislation. The moving testimony demonstrated the need for a stronger statute that will better protect Minnesota kids.

That's why the proposed Safe and Supportive Schools Act should become law. The current statute doesn't do enough to help protect students or to give guidance to school staff. Authored by Sen. Scott Dibble and Rep. Jim Davnie, both DFL-Minneapolis, the bill would require schools to develop detailed antibullying policies, educate staff and provide support for all students who have been victims.

The proposal also identifies several groups that are disproportionately targeted because of their race, religion or sexual orientation, consistent with Min-

nesota human rights laws. Despite the claims of critics, however, the bill clearly applies to all students, no matter what motivates their tormentors.

Responding to concerns raised about the original measure, Dibble wisely amended the bill to tighten the definition of bullying to a pattern of "intimidating, threatening, abusive or harming conduct."

That means, for example, that one incident of name calling wouldn't qualify. Bullying is defined as repeated verbal or physical intimidation that prevents a student from feeling safe.

The bill also was amended to require staff training every three years instead of every year, and it dropped the requirement to train volunteers. In addition, district reporting requirements were deleted, though a special advisory board would be set up to study how bullying could be monitored statewide.

Minnesota's current 37-word statute is one of the weakest antibullying laws in the nation. It was adopted in 2006 and amended in 2008 to include online bullying. But it only requires school boards to come up with policies that address bullying without defining it or giving any guidance on what to do about it.

The proposed law would change that. That's why it is supported by more than 100 Min-

nesota organizations that are members of the Safe Schools For All Coalition. The group includes education, disability, youth, religious, LGBT and social-service organizations that have worked to build public support for a stronger law.

Critics maintain that even the amended proposal is overly broad and that it may impinge upon free speech rights. They're also concerned that complying will be too costly for school districts.

They fail to acknowledge that districts that have been successfully sued for failing to protect students from bullying know that litigation can carry a much higher price tag.

The new requirements would provide tools that could easily be worked into professional development training for staff. And raising awareness among students about the consequences could help students reduce incidents and avoid lawsuits.

A stronger state statute will not eliminate intolerant behavior among kids. But the new law can set a tone, raise awareness and send an important message that bullying won't be tolerated. And, most important, it would give students and their families more confidence that Minnesota schools are welcoming, safe places to learn for all kids.

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