

# OPINION

OUR VIEW

## Plan ahead for closures

Mother Nature reminded Minnesotans of her strength this week by sending more than 16 inches of snow followed by frigid temperatures.

This kind of weather makes us proud to live in the Icebox of the Nation while at the same time prompts us we must never let our guard down in winter.

As all Minnesota communities will do, we will dig out, hunker down, and think about how we will better prepare ourselves for the next round. We've encouraged people to get the survival kit and extra winter clothing to the items routinely carried in vehicles.

But we must also prepare for emergency closing of schools, such as happened Wednesday in International Falls. School officials said conditions changed quickly and the announcement of the closings came with little advance notice to parents and the community. The school's automated call system alerted parents that the schools would close just 15 or so minutes later. However, it's important parents provide accurate and up-to-date contact information to the school for the system to effectively work.

In an ideal world, the decision to close would have given the community hours to respond. But playing armchair

quarterback in this case isn't productive. Minnesota's winter storms are rarely ideal for schools and their transportation systems. But on Wednesday, this community's children all arrived to warm destinations safely.

We're encouraged to hear of a few stories in which neighbors invited school children into their homes to stay warm until parents could be contacted and respond.

But we urge parents to have a plan in place for these kinds of emergencies. Can family members fill in when parents cannot respond? Can neighbors help out? Are children old enough to carry a spare house key to get inside when school is closed?

Each year, fire prevention education programs encourage families to plan a safe place to meet in the event of a fire. We'd like to see a similar effort by families to ensure after the buses deliver the children home, they are able to get inside a safe place.

Public schools play an important role in keeping our children safe during the school day, but it's ultimately up to parents and the community to make sure in emergency school closings, children remain unharmed.

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GUEST COLUMN

## The dog days of Obamacare

I've heard a lot of interesting stories of people trying, and failing, to sign up for ObamaCare, but this one takes the cake.

According to UPI, Shane Smith, of Fort Collins, Colo., had his new ObamaCare insurance opened under his dog's name.

As it goes, Smith's existing plan was canceled because it failed to meet the requirements of ObamaCare. After considerable effort, he was finally able to establish an ObamaCare policy — but the government service representative accidentally assigned the policy to Baxter, Smith's 14-year-old Yorkshire terrier.

I'll bet that could lead to some interesting medical situations:

Smith: Doctor, I strained a tendon in my foot pretty badly.

Doctor: You were chasing the mailman?

Such is the law of unintended consequences when the government — to keep our dog analogy going — bites off way more than it can chew.

Doctors' appointments will be the least of Smith's problems, though. If the government assigned his insurance policy to his dog, what other information might it have gotten wrong? What happens when he needs to make use of his insurance policy?

Smith to ObamaCare representative: I had cataract surgery, but my insurance company refuses to pay the claim!

ObamaCare representative: I'm sorry, Baxter, but your policy doesn't cover DOG



Tom  
PURCELL

cataracts.

Smith: My name isn't Baxter and I am not a dog!

ObamaCare representative: Then why are you barking at me?

Baxter will likely be upset with his new insurance policy, too. His premium will likely be double or triple what he was able to get before ObamaCare.

He'll bark when he realizes he has to carry maternity coverage — despite getting neutered in 1999.

He'll growl when sees how high his deductibles will be — and that Smith's middle-class income disqualifies him for government subsidies.

He'll howl when he loses his biscuits — especially since President Obama promised him that if he liked his biscuits, he could keep his biscuits!

Where government bureaucracy is concerned, bureaucratic errors have a way of multiplying.

Will Smith endure a full IRS audit for taking interest deductions on a doghouse?

What happens when Smith retires and begins receiving Social Security — and the payments are to Baxter?

Baxter, already 98 in dog

years, likely won't be cashing checks for long. When he passes, will Smith spend the rest of his retirement trying to correct an error that originated with ObamaCare?

Anyone who has ever dealt with government bureaucracy — anyone who has ever sat at the Department of Motor Vehicles, waiting to get a license photo taken — is aware of the limitations of government bureaucracy.

Sure, there are always going to be functions that we should rely on local, state and federal governments to do — but shouldn't we limit these functions? Do we really want something as personal and important as our health care to be managed by government bureaucracies?

The many unintended consequences of ObamaCare are rearing their ugly heads, causing many of the program's most enthusiastic supporters to pause and ask, "Isn't there a better way to help the uninsured without the government playing such a hands-on role?"

Well, Smith says that after some effort, he thinks he got his dog's name removed from his policy. But with government bureaucracy being what it is, there are no guarantees his problem is solved.

He'll know for sure if a high-ranking ObamaCare bureaucrat makes this promise to him:

"If you want to keep your name on your insurance policy, you can keep your name on your policy!"

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### How to contact your lawmakers

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