

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Hands on the wheel

A distracted driving crackdown in Minnesota is showing disturbing results just days into the effort.

State troopers are reporting drivers stopped for texting while driving, but even more alarming is drivers have been stopped for applying nail polish and watching videos.

The Minnesota State Patrol is leading the crackdown and more than 300 police agencies in the state are involved in the effort. Distracted or inattentive driving is when a driver engages in any activity that might distract them from the primary task of driving and increases their risk of crashing.

More law officers are expected to be on the road through Saturday to call attention to the dangers of distracted driving. Fines start at \$125.

The crackdown is part of a push to call attention to the role driver distraction plays in crashes in the state. Each year in Minnesota, distracted or inattentive driving is a factor in one in four crashes, resulting in at least 70 deaths and 350 serious injuries, according to the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety estimates these numbers are vastly underreported due to law enforcement's challenge in determining distraction as a crash factor.

In Minnesota, it is illegal for drivers to read, compose or send text messages and emails, or access the Internet using a wireless device while the vehicle is in motion or a part of traffic — and that includes when stopped in traffic or at a traffic light. Cell phone use is totally banned for school bus drivers and for teen drivers during their permit and provisional license stages.

But texting and cell phones aren't the only distractions out there, as the troopers are reporting. Other driver distractions include eating, setting music players, reading maps, disciplining or attempting to control children in the back seat among others.

The Minnesota Department of Public Safety offers the following tips to minimize distractions: Turn off cell phones; pre-program radio stations or other music devices; map out destinations before you leave and pull over if you need to check the map or the navigation device; stop to eat or avoid messy foods; and teach children the importance of good behavior in a vehicle.

For everyone's sake, driving should be the main focus when someone gets behind the wheel. The driving distractions can be the main focus of attention when you turn off the engine and step out of the vehicle.

How to contact your lawmakers

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The Journal welcomes letters from readers

Letters should be limited to 500 words or less. Longer letters may be edited. Letters must be signed and include the telephone number and address of the letter writer. Only the author's city address will be published.

Mail letters to The Journal, 1602 Highway 71, International Falls 56649. Letters can also be sent by e-mail to laurel@ifallsjournal.com.



GUEST COLUMN

Stemming the tide against Alzheimer's disease

Many of us know a loved one who has faced Alzheimer's disease. It's a wrenching experience—watching them slowly slip away, trying to be a source of comfort and companionship, even as a cure remains painfully out of reach. Alzheimer's has come to be known as the “long goodbye,” a disease that gradually takes its toll on millions of people in Minnesota and across the country every year.

As one of the leading causes of death in the United States, Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia claim more than 500,000 lives per year. Right now, there are close to 5.2 million Americans living with Alzheimer's disease, including nearly 100,000 right here in Minnesota. In 2013, more than 15 million family members and friends cared for someone with Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia.

Most troubling, this problem is projected to grow dramatically in coming years as the Baby Boomer generation ages. By 2050, it is estimated that 13.5 million Americans will be living with Alzheimer's—nearly triple the number of people affected today.

The financial costs of providing care for those



Amy KLOBUCHAR
U.S. SENATOR

afflicted is staggering. Whether the expenses cover treatment, hospice, or long-term care, they can take an enormous toll on family and government budgets. This year alone, we will spend \$226 billion caring for people with Alzheimer's and other dementias. By 2050, that number is projected to reach an astronomic \$1.1 trillion.

Of course, these numbers don't tell the most important part of the story, that of the countless families shattered by Alzheimer's and the enormous toll it takes on those living with the disease. Each of their experiences remind us that now is the time to stem the tide against this horrific disease.

We can start by making investments in cutting-

edge research today that will make a difference tomorrow. We need to make sure there are dedicated scientists, advanced research initiatives, and skilled doctors with the resources to conduct trials and care for patients until we finally find a cure.

That is why I have joined with Republican Senator Susan Collins of Maine to call on Congress to make the necessary investments. We are pushing to make combatting Alzheimer's a top national priority, including doubling the research funding by 2016 with a goal of developing effective treatments by 2025. This funding will build on the momentum and cutting-edge research already being done at great institutions such as the University of Minnesota and the Mayo Clinic.

Exciting medical advancements hold the promise of revolutionizing the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of Alzheimer's disease. We have already begun to see extraordinary results in precision medicine approaches that tailor prevention and treatment by taking into account individual variability in genes, environ-

ment, and lifestyle in other diseases, and related research for Alzheimer's is currently underway.

These investments make sense because we know that they will pay off. For example, simply delaying the onset of Alzheimer's by five years would significantly cut the government's spending on care and most importantly, give people more time with their loved ones.

But medical research is only part of the solution. We also need to develop policies to help caregivers meet the challenges of caring for a family member with Alzheimer's. That's why my bipartisan Americans Giving Care to Elders Act would give family caregivers a tax credit and other assistance to help alleviate the financial burdens that come with caring for a loved one.

Alzheimer's disease presents one of the toughest medical, economic, and social challenges facing our country. Solutions to problems this vast and devastating aren't going to just fall out the sky. Instead, we need decisive and bold action that will bring the possibility for a cure within reach and finally end this horrific disease.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mental health advocates want to build on what works

To the editor,

A recent article made mention of mental health advocates views on how to improve the mental health system. During the last eight years, significant reforms have been made to the mental health system. This includes the development of mobile crisis services, intensive residential treatment, assertive community treatment teams (ACT), in-home rehabilitative services and affordable and supportive housing. They have shown great promise in helping people recover from their mental illness and live well in the community. The problem? We don't have enough of them.

Shortages are due to a number of issues including

lack of coverage by private insurance, workforce shortages, payment rates and lack of start-up costs. A big push is expanding mobile crisis teams to relieve police of responding to a mental health crisis and funding protected transport so that police and ambulances don't have to transport people in crisis. All these issues are before the Legislature this session.

The article made mention of “beds” and that the mental health advocates are opposed to more beds. Like most issues, this is more complicated. Reports that have been done have generally looked at only state run longer term “beds” such as at Anoka Regional Treatment Center. They don't count “beds” run by

the private sector nor do they count acute care beds in private hospitals, nor do they count crisis beds nor do they count the number of people on an ACT team – which are often called hospitals without walls.

It's true we are not asking for more acute care hospital beds, nor is anyone else — including hospitals. Hospital administrators don't want to build up the most expensive part of our health care system. There is a front door issue – namely how do we prevent people with a mental illness needing hospital level of care or using the emergency room; and a back door issue – where are the “step-down” programs that will help people after they've been discharged from the

hospital. Building up our community mental health system will address these problems and the problems faced by our criminal justice system.

Mental health advocates don't want to build centers where people stay one night. We want to build on what we know already works. What we are asking for are crisis beds, where people generally stay 3 to 10 days; more intensive residential treatment, where people stay 30 to 90 days; and more intensive supports for people in their homes, where they spend most of their lives.

Sue Aberdholden
executive director
NAMI Minnesota
St. Paul, MN

Other sports should take notice on how it should be done

To the editor,

I attended the Top of the Nation wrestling Sunday, April 12. That is, without a doubt, the best thing in sports for kids going in International Falls.

Each and every kid get-

ting to participate, boys and girls showing their skills. Handshakes before and after their matches. Then the kids would shake hands with the parents.

The discipline and respect of those kids – amazing.

I seen kids laughing and crying; parents laughing and crying.

The coaching, over the top, consoling the losers, high-fiving the winners, which was the beauty of it all. There were no real los-

ers there. Those kids had a blast.

Other sports for kids in International Falls should take notice on how it should be done. It's all about the kids.

Darren Wallen
International Falls, MN