

# OPINION

## MINNESOTA OPINION

### Reliable internet never more critical than now

Minnesota has been scuffling along for years in expanding high-speed internet, especially deeper into rural areas, like (parts of Kandiyohi County). The urgency has been likened to bringing electricity and indoor plumbing to farms and elsewhere in America in the early 1900s.

And never has true border-to-border broadband been as urgent or as in dire need as right now, in the midst of our unprecedented public health emergency, with hundreds of thousands of Minnesota employees and students suddenly home, learning and working remotely.

Those who can, that is. Politics too often put ahead of appropriate funding and public policy has left an estimated 14% to 17% of Minnesota households still without access to internet service or connection speeds fast enough for videoconferencing or other aspects of office and class work. The limitations have been frustratingly clear to far too many Minnesotans during this pandemic.

“Broadband service has been holding up well overall across the state (Minnesota) so far, despite the surge in telework.”

#### MINNESOTA PUBLIC RADIO COMMENT

“Broadband is a necessary tool for residents in our region,” Sen. David Tomassoni of Chisholm said in a News Tribune editorial — way back in 2017. Then, the Legislature had a \$900 million total funding goal, and about 22% of homes in rural areas still lacked internet connections at even basic speeds.

A year ago, in another editorial, the newspaper reported that legislative efforts to address broadband needs had started in 2014, and that the state's recent \$85 million investment had made Minnesota “a national model that other states are using to make sure they aren't left behind,” according to Nancy Hoffman of North Branch, Minn., chairwoman of the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition, who was quoted. Last year, the Legislature approved another \$40 million in grants.

But progress has been unnecessarily stymied, too, including in 2018 when then-Gov. Mark Dayton vetoed pretty much everything in a move that was purely politics, yet another DFLers-vs.-Republicans spat that got in the way of meeting Minnesotans' needs in favor of satisfying party wants.

The result is a lingering broadband shortfall being felt right now by far too many Minnesotans, frustratingly still unable to work or learn from home at a time when we all need to be home.

On the upside, as Barron's reported this week, “The internet is doing just fine” even though “we're all using more bandwidth for video conferences and streaming, the only things maintaining any sense of normalcy in our lives. ... The good news is that U.S. networks are handling the traffic spikes without any major hiccups.”

In Minnesota, too, “Broadband service has been holding up well overall across the state so far, despite the surge in telework,” as Minnesota Public Radio reported a week ago.

That doesn't mean lawmakers can continue to treat Minnesota's broadband needs as a political pawn or as something less than immediately urgent once a semblance of normalcy returns to St. Paul.

This pandemic has forced all of us to focus on basics. And if it wasn't clear before, it is now: Reliable internet is as basic as indoor plumbing and electricity were a century ago.

This editorial is the opinion of the Duluth News-Tribune's editorial board.

#### READER OPINION SUBMISSIONS

We welcome letters to the editor on topics of public interest. Your letter should be clear and concise. Letters exceeding 350 words will not be considered. Letters may be edited for grammar, clarity, length and style.

Submit letters preferably by email to letters@wctrib.com, by fax to 320-235-6769 or mail us at Letters the Editor, West Central Tribune, P.O. Box 839, Willmar, MN 56201-0839.



#### READER OPINION

##### Don't believe Lysen propaganda

Reading Paul Lysen's recent letter to the editor reminds me of why I left the Republican Party 10 years ago: I became sick of the gross exaggerations, outright lies and misleading things said to try to gain power.

Many rural Democrats, including Congressman Collin Peterson and myself, are pro-life. We always have been. We do not support abortion except under dire and medically necessary circumstances. We also think it is pro-life to assist low-income mothers and babies, before and after birth, with life-sustaining things like medical care, food support and public education (including special ed for disabled children).

By contrast, many supposedly pro-life Republicans have supported cuts to Medicaid, SNAP food support and special ed.

Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life surveys have become misleading.

When I ran for state senate four years ago, I received a MCLL survey. Of the 10 questions, three had little or nothing to do with being pro-life. They were political questions related to whether I support the Citizens United decision and other extreme, right-wing positions.

I could not honestly answer such baited questions “yes,” and was thus branded as insufficiently pro-life.

If Peterson's “pro-life” ratings declined in recent years, it is probably because MCLL has become more of an arm of the Republican Party and less of

a supporter of women facing a difficult pregnancy.

Twelve years ago, when I chaired Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Board, I worked with local health agencies and Sen. Steve Dille to halt a bill supported by MCLL that would have slashed funding for free contraceptives for low-income women in Meeker-McLeod-Sibley. If MCLL truly wants to reduce abortions, it should support, not oppose, affordable contraception.

Readers may recall that Citizens United opened floodgates to unlimited, anonymous “dark money” to fund political campaigns. We've all seen these odious political ads claiming that so-and-so is a demon from hell based on a single vote on a complex bill.

MCLL (which is directed by Michelle Fischbach's husband) wants to allow large donations from anonymous donors to continue to support its (and other special interest groups') lobbying efforts.

Minions like Mr. Lysen have been duped into believing that being opposed to dark money in politics is somehow pro-death. It is not. For him to slam Congressman Peterson because he favors campaign finance reform, and claim that a vote against an unnecessary, politically motivated amendment that won't save a single baby's life is somehow “pro-death” are flat-out lies. Don't believe his propaganda.

Amy Wilde  
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## Sleepless in Santa Monica

When I was a kid, my mother and sister used to castigate me for being too emotional (I cried), not tough enough. “Susie just can't handle hard things,” the two of them would smugly agree.

As it turned out, Susie didn't have any choice.

No one has questioned whether I'm tough enough since I walked out of an alley after having been raped and was determined to change the law of rape once I started law school in the fall. “Lemonade stands are my specialty,” I used to joke as I juggled professional and personal lessons.

Like most of you my age, I discovered — maybe earlier than most — that you do what you have to do, survive what you cannot change. Not that it's easy. But you do it. And after I collapsed on a sidewalk in New York almost 10 years ago, stressed, exhausted and dehydrated, the doctors were unsure whether I had a seizure, but the sensible neurologist I was lucky enough to see explained to me that anyone can seize if the body is stressed enough, and — this was the important part, since I was always stressed enough — the best way to protect against that is to sleep, seven hours every night.

I used to love to sleep. That was a long time ago. But I learned to turn out the light when I was down to seven hours, to meditate, to breathe slowly, to get to sleep.

And for the last three weeks, it has mostly worked. I say mostly because I am so afraid for the high-risk people I love. Mostly because the idea of taking someone you love to the hospital and never seeing him or her again, of no many people dying alone with no one holding their hand, as I have done too many times, brings me to tears. Mostly because I'm unable to resist spending hours every morning and evening reading six newspapers. But mostly I have been OK.

Last night, for the first time since my father died so many years ago, I could not sleep at all. The fear wouldn't settle. There was

every reason to be terrified for my beloved nanny, second mom to my kids, the woman who for 30 years, through divorce and illness and hard times, has always been by my side. She is fighting bad cancer that Kaiser Permanente failed to diagnose for years, going in and out of the hospital for seven to 10 days for treatments that, at most, may prolong life.

How do I tell her to stop going to the market, to not see her grandchildren, to quarantine with me, when this is the only life she may have? I rail against Kaiser and President Donald Trump and the Chinese government. I do not fall asleep.

I try to do slow breathing: in for four, hold for four, out for four — or 10, if you're hardcore. I close my eyes and picture myself descending to the rocky beach where the fishermen used to sell their catch of lobsters, except it just makes me think of my sister, who lives right there now and can't leave her apartment because her heart is not strong enough to survive this virus.

One of the hardest things about this pandemic — in addition to everything else that is hard, in addition to the terror of what could happen next — is forgiving yourself. Even harder is forgiving those around you who thought they were young and immortal and have discovered that they are neither. I want to do better than I am: to stay positive for the people I love; to be grateful that there are doctors and nurses and medics and firefighters and police officers and soldiers and day workers who are risking their own lives to try to save ours. I want to use the time to accomplish something; to read great books, to start jogging, to write more. I want to sleep six hours a night.

But last night I couldn't. And maybe I won't tomorrow or the next day. I will stress eat white chocolate. I will forget to eat at all. I will drink too much soda, spend too much time reading the news. I will do so many things wrong. You, too, probably.

But this much we can try to do: be nice in the midst of fear and misery. Stay kind. To others. And to ourselves. Nice, kind.

Susan Estrich can be reached at sestrich@wctrib.com.



SUSAN ESTRICH

## Joe Biden calling

After weeks of criticizing President Trump for not “doing enough” in the fight against the COVID-19 virus and suggesting the president take actions he had already



CAL THOMAS  
 Tribune  
 Media  
 Services

taken, presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden picked up the phone and called the White House. Given his confusion about so many things, perhaps he thought he was ordering a takeout meal and dialed the wrong number. The president would not give details of their conversation other than to say it was a “nice” call. Did Biden apologize for some of his criticisms of the president? Did he suggest the two take a unified approach to the virus and stop using it for political advantage? Did he say he would speak with Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other Democrats, asking them to remember the virus does not discriminate between Democrats and Republicans?

I'm betting none of this happened, so to find out what was said we will have to wait for a “whistleblower” to release the transcript. There is a larger concern about Joe Biden, and I am not the first to mention it. Too often he seems “out of it,” to employ a nonmedical term. The long list of his gaffes has become legion. At one point, they were funny.

The Republican Party and the Trump-Pence reelection campaign have been paying close attention to Biden's latest mistakes, untruths and gaffes. Here's a partial list, courtesy of FactCheck.org, which the GOP sent me, and others on its email list, with links to make it easier for fact-checkers:

— He lied in an op-ed he wrote, which maintained Trump couldn't deal properly with coronavirus or any pandemic.

— He pushed the bogus claim President Trump called coronavirus a “hoax.”

— He falsely claimed that President Trump turned down an offer from the WHO to provide testing kits.

— He claimed the Trump Admin cut funding for the CDC when, in reality, CDC funding has gone up under President Trump.

(Reminder, Obama/Biden sought CDC cuts in five of eight of their budget proposals.) Trump did initially seek cuts, but quickly reversed course.

— He falsely accused President Trump of disbanding the entire NSC team in charge of pandemic responses.

Joe Biden couldn't even make it through “The Tonight Show” without making glaring mistakes:

— He forgot what the Defense Production Act was called no less than 30 seconds after citing it.

— He needed notes to get through a comedy show.

— He called the coronavirus the “conavirus.”

— He got the number of grandkids he has wrong ... again.

Another example of how Biden either doesn't read the newspapers or doesn't watch TV news: At the end of January when President Trump announced travel restrictions with China, Biden was criticizing President Trump for “xenophobia.” In other words, Biden was against the China travel ban before he was for it. It is just another of numerous Biden flips that make him appear like a fish out of water, pandering to the left wing that controls his party in order to get the nomination.

His shifting positions and behavior will not help him in a debate with President Trump. Republican ads will devastate Biden as a hypocrite at best and a liar at worst.

Add to this Biden's aforementioned confusion whenever he speaks and you have someone clearly unfit to be his party's nominee, much less president of the United States.

Cal Thomas can be reached at cthomas@wctrib.com.