

# THE OPINION PAGE

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OUR OPINION

## Health care: You need it, it needs you

**Herald editorial board**  
Revenue at North Dakota hospitals has fallen by an estimated 50% since the coronavirus pandemic hit. The Minnesota Hospital Association estimates its members will lose \$2.9 billion by midsummer.

Those numbers were reported by the Herald Saturday in a piece headlined "Next big concern for hospitals: Bottom line." It's a cruel twist of irony: When we need our hospitals and clinics the most, those places are struggling more than ever. They have turned their focus toward treating, or preventing, an outbreak in their communities, and general procedures and visits have been pushed aside. Those are a hospital's greatest revenue sources.

The proverbial bleeding continues. The American Hospital Association, for instance, estimates U.S. hospitals are losing upwards of \$50 billion per month.

Wednesday, the Herald published a letter from Dr. Steven Weiser, president of Altru Health System. Weiser assured readers the hospital is safe and that staff there are working to expand services beyond coronavirus care.

"Across the country, patients are postponing care," he wrote. "They are ignoring signs and symptoms. They are avoiding the ER. This has led to advancing disease and more emergent care needed for patients. We do not want this for our community. ... We now have several measures in place that allow us to expand our services."

Among them: Separated "well" and "sick" clinics, better screening and expanded virtual care. Also, Altru has implemented a quarantine and screening process for scheduled surgeries.

Weiser says it's safe to reach out to the hospital for necessary visits that may have been put off. That includes regular clinic appointments, surgeries and emergency care.

Continuing to delay certain procedures – such as screenings – isn't a wise health decision. And those decisions certainly aren't helping Altru's bottom line.

This isn't a local issue, as hospitals nationwide are putting focus back toward surgeries and procedures.

The website Modern Healthcare reported hospitals in Michigan are moving back toward normalcy for non-coronavirus procedures. The report quoted Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, who said "we are encouraging anyone who has been holding off on surgery that really needs to be done to get that scheduled and to proceed."

Weiser, in his letter, said Altru has enhanced its testing capabilities, and also that staff, patients and visitors are screened before entering the system's facilities.

With these precautions in mind, Weiser is urging the region's residents to consider their health care needs. Altru was always open, but had adopted limits during the early stages of the pandemic; now, the hospital is ready to expand its ability to see all patients.

"Schedule your annual exam. See your primary provider. ... Refill your prescriptions. Get your necessary lab work. Don't ignore the symptoms of a stroke or heart attack," he said. "We'll work with you to deliver the care you need in a manner you are most comfortable."

Doing so is a win-win. It's obviously good for the patient, whose health could suffer by delaying procedures. And it's good for local hospitals – not just Altru, but also care centers throughout the region – as they try to return to a place of financial stability.

VIEWPOINT

## An update from ND majority leaders

**By Chet Pollert and Rich Wardner**  
Although legislative interim committees have been postponed due to the coronavirus, your legislative leaders have been working closely with Gov. Burgum and Lt. Gov. Sanford to ensure that the citizens of North Dakota have the resources and support they need to emerge from this challenge in the best possible position. We have appreciated the valuable information our legislators have gathered from their constituents regarding the needs and concerns from all corners of the state. Your voices are being heard and we thank you. Your perseverance and dedication to your neighbors and communities is what North Dakota is all about.

In these unprecedented times, we've already seen our state step up in many ways. North Dakota has processed a record number of unemployment benefits, extended the income tax filing deadline, and expanded unemployment insurance eligibility. The governor has removed red tape wherever necessary in order to make government work efficiently for its citizens, while closing only those businesses necessary to slow the spread of the virus. Many people have been working diligently to develop innovative ways to improve and expand testing and make sure the most vulnerable in our state are



Wardner



Pollert

protected. Local governments are working with businesses to ease restrictions and provide distance learning programs for students. Private industry has also risen to the challenge through innovation in order to provide critical services, while local lenders have worked strenuously to provide PPP dollars to our state's small businesses.

The federal government has provided assistance as well. Last month we received guidance on how the \$1.25 billion CARES Act dollars allocated to North Dakota can be spent. The good news is that the federal government gave the state broad discretion to use the money as it deems necessary to respond to the local coronavirus impact and related economic shortfall. This allows the Legislature and other leaders to determine the best use of these dollars for North Dakota in a matter that rejects a "one size fits all" approach. One major concern was being able to replenish the state's unemployment insurance fund, which has paid out over \$100 million. Thankfully, the federal dollars can be used to refill these funds if needed.

In addition, the Bank of

North Dakota announced two new loan programs designed to fill the gaps in the federal PPP that exist for small and large businesses. The Small Employer Loan Fund (SELF) is a one-percent loan option through local lenders modeled after the Rebuilder's Loan Program after the 2011 floods in our state. The Covid19 PACE Recovery Program (CPRP) is for larger employers to access long-term, low-interest loans for working capital and cash flow. The Budget Section plans to authorize BND to utilize \$200 million of the state's CARES Act dollars to buy down the interest on these loans without the need for a community match. Legislative leaders provided key insight on the development of these programs and will continue to provide input as these loan programs are implemented. We are fortunate to be the only state in the nation with a state bank that can provide such low-interest loans.

Some have asked if we intend to call a special session to address the COVID-19 response and other budgetary concerns. The truth is, calling a special session right now would be premature and a misuse of taxpayer dollars. We have not yet seen the full impact from PPP or EIDL payments, nor have we received guidance on the CARES Act agriculture assistance program. In addition, many of the concerns related to COVID-19 are already being

addressed at the state and local levels in ways that do not require legislative action. For example, the BND loan program is a way the state is responding to gaps in federal funding that falls fully within the authority of the Bank.

From a state budgeting perspective, we do not yet have a full picture on sales tax revenue impacts, which is a key indicator of the state's overall economy. Nor do we have stable oil prices with which to make budgetary projections. All of this information should be much clearer by the time we prepare for the regular session in December. Any additional spending or adjustments that require approval in the meantime can be addressed by the interim Budget Section, which is the norm during every interim. Special sessions are best reserved for defined issues that can be addressed with adequate information and ample time for discussion, which is not the case at the present time.

We are proud of North Dakotans coming together during these unprecedented times and we stand ready for the work ahead. With grit, determination and smart leadership, we will get through this together and emerge as a stronger and more united North Dakota.

*Rep. Chet Pollert, R-Carrington, is House majority leader in the North Dakota Legislature. Sen. Rich Wardner, R-Dickinson, is Senate majority leader.*

DOUBLE PLAY



Biden's Female Running Mate

IN THE MAIL

### This week, we should thank teachers

To the editor,  
This week marks "Teacher Appreciation Week" and there has never been a better time to highlight the true professionalism and service of Grand Forks and Grand Forks Air Force Base School District teachers during distance learning under the umbrella of COVID-19! When North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum issued an executive order for school districts to create and implement a distance learning plan over the course of a few business days, of which needed approval by the Governor and the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, many outside of public education wondered if this was even possible. Given our teaching and support staff, principals and district leadership (and in the middle of a spring break), I said "We've got this!" Easy

for me to say!

But to my point, every member of our educational team has risen to a global gold standard level. Witnessed during this transition has been teacher creativity, collaboration, infinite competency, participation and engagement that illustrates the commitment of our teachers to our students. Teacher altruism? Check! Teacher care and concern? Check! Teacher grit? Check!

This is a hallmark time for public education, particularly in Grand Forks and at the Grand Forks Air Force Base, and I am proud that teachers have showcased their immense talent. Someday, teachers will look back in awe of what they accomplished. But today, they are too busy connecting with students academically, socially and emotionally through technology. Like students, they miss daily

interactions in a single physical space. Like students, they have shed tears over losing their educational family in a schoolhouse environment. Like all of us, we cannot wait to be reunited at our campuses when that time comes.

If you have a moment, please send a note to a teacher who is making or has made a difference in your student's life as a way of celebrating "Teacher Appreciation Week."

Thank you.

**Terry Brenner**

*Terry Brenner is superintendent of the Grand Forks and Grand Forks Air Force Base School Districts*

### Shameful display in Grand Forks

To the editor,  
It shook everyone I know when the Juba Coffee House was firebombed in December of 2015. Events like that weren't supposed to happen

here. Not in my hometown of Grand Forks.

Now we have an incident with college students standing atop a house near the UND campus and shouting "white power" to passersby on an early morning last month.

This is simply unacceptable.

We must work to ensure that acts like this are met with the same repulsion that united our community against racism in 2015.

I feel sorry for the young men who took part in this shameful display. Their actions, while likely designed to be outlandish, were terribly hurtful – and will last with them for the rest of their lives.

We must not allow the racism that has been given voice over the past several years in this country to have a foothold in Grand Forks.

We are better than that.  
**Melissa Van Hoff**  
Grand Forks

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Letters should be limited to 350 words and must include the name of the author. Shorter letters are preferred. A telephone number should be included (the number will not be published).

All letters are subject to editing for grammar, length, accuracy and clarity. The Herald will consider longer submissions for its Viewpoint columns. These are limited to writers with specific or pertinent expertise on an issue. Viewpoint columns must include a photo of the author.

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## Grand Forks Herald

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– GEORGE WINSHIP, Herald founder

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