

Opinion

OUR VIEW

Take a break from mammograms? Break time's over.

The COVID-19 pandemic has dominated headlines around the world for nearly two years, and with good reason. More than 200 million people have contracted the illness, and the global death toll is approaching 5 million. Those are grim numbers, and they grow every day. Dozens of health organizations, media outlets and government agencies track the pandemic's path and trajectory in real time. COVID-19's collateral impact, however, will likely take years, perhaps even a decade or more to fully comprehend and tabulate – and some of that impact will be felt by women who are diagnosed with breast cancer.

The math is fairly simple. In April 2020, 87% fewer mammograms were performed nationwide compared to April 2019. Some screening sites simply shut down, and many hospitals suspended preventive tests and non-emergency procedures in an effort to reduce close contacts at a time when the virus was spreading unchecked, with no vaccine available. Human nature being what it is, some women doubtless felt at least a bit of relief when their mammograms were postponed. The procedure isn't exactly comfortable, and 10% of women who get regular mammograms will get an unnerving "call back" at some point. While the vast majority of those women

don't have cancer, the time between that call and the eventual all-clear can be long and frightening. But if you are among the women who took a break from annual mammograms in 2020 and have yet to get back in the routine – well, break time is officially over. October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month – and in some ways, this observance brings attention to a success story. Globally, no cancer is more common than breast cancer, with 2.26 million cases diagnosed annually, but the death tolls from other forms of cancer (lung, colon, prostate and skin) are significantly higher. Since 1990, screening and early detection of breast cancer through

mammography have saved more than half a million lives in the United States. A recent study found that the 10-year survival rate of women diagnosed with breast cancer is 50% higher for those who had received two regular screenings prior to their diagnosis. But stunningly, only half of eligible women in the United States do not get annual mammograms – including 25% of those who have insurance that would pay for it. As is the case with many cancer screenings, one of the biggest barriers is fear. People are afraid of procedures that are new to them, and there's still a persistent, often unconscious belief that if you feel fine, you are fine.

That's simply not the case with many forms of cancer, including breast cancer. Women who wait until they feel a lump to see their doctor have a much worse prognosis. So now's the time to resume an old routine, or to start a new one. Make the call. Set up the appointment. Men, if your wife, girlfriend or partner is reluctant, go the extra mile to encourage them. Volunteer to schedule your own tests for cholesterol, prostate cancer and a colonoscopy if you're due for one. After all, the pandemic didn't just delay mammograms – and the last thing anyone wants is to survive COVID-19, only to find out that a missed screening gave another disease extra time to take hold.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CAN AMERICA SURVIVE BIDEN'S ADMINISTRATION?

What a disgrace? The Biden Administration's handling of the Afghanistan withdrawal is a national disgrace and an insult to anyone who has ever worn the uniform of the U.S. military. The uncontrolled southern border of our country is a major security

threat to us. A country without a secure border is not a country. It should be apparent to everyone that Joe Biden and his vice president are not up to the job and are controlled by the extreme far left. I hope that America as we know it is strong enough to survive. **W.R. Berlin Jr.**, Frontenac

WHITWATER TRAVELERS BEWARE ...

Could you make a public service announcement in your newspaper that anyone traveling in the Whitewater State Park and Lazy D Campground areas that rely on a Verizon cellphone for communications, the Verizon

cellphone has zero signal in this area. With a Verizon cellphone in this area, even a 911 call is impossible. This notice may prevent an accident before it happens. **Orville Cole**, Rochester

GAZELKA'S PUBLIC SAFETY TALK IS DOUBLE-TALK

In a recent article published by the Post Bulletin, Paul Gazelka claims that he is the "public safety candidate." This is shameless double talk from the senator. Despite refusing to abide by public health measures during the pandemic, Gazelka is crying out for "public safety reform." How can Gazelka, whose track record with COVID-19 reflects nothing but errors and false claims, truly champion the wellbeing of Minnesotans? From the first day of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gazelka challenged all of Gov. Walz's COVID-19 related precautions. He prioritized playing politics, spread misinformation, and cast unhealthy doubt on proven public health recommendations. He went so far as to host a maskless dinner for over a hundred Republican lawmakers. The event caused an outbreak that likely resulted in the

unfortunate passing of Sen. Jerry Relph due to COVID complications. Senate Republicans took no accountability for their actions and blatantly refused to inform their DFL colleagues or the venue about the virus spreading between legislators. Four months into the pandemic, Gazelka declared that "the emergency part of this pandemic is over" in a press conference and encouraged the state to stop taking it seriously. The U.S. has lost hundreds of thousands of people since that statement, proving that his claims were dangerously inaccurate. How can Paul Gazelka say he is the "public safety" candidate when he has put the public in harm's way for months? This is the sort of blatant double talk that Minnesotans have had enough of. **Sen. Matt Klein, MD**, Mendota Heights

US CAN CARVE OUT A MORE PEACEFUL LEADERSHIP ROLE

Despite spending trillions of dollars, waging counterterrorism in 85 countries, having combat troops in eight nations, plus countless targeted assassinations, the war on terror has not succeeded. President Biden, in announcing troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, said as much: "Over the past 20 years, the [terrorism] threat has become more dispersed, metastasizing around the globe." Other than withdrawing troops from Afghanistan, the U.S. continues with the same approach. The Senate Armed Services Committee and the House voted for a \$25 billion increase in the Pentagon budget. Drone strikes and aerial bombing with their civilian casualties continue. Modernization of the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal and arms sales to multiple nations – even those with human rights violations – continues.

Seeking an alternative approach, 24 people – "a cross-section of advocates, activists, organizers, faith community leaders, and scholars" – met for two hours twice a month for six months ending in April 2021. This resulted in a discussion paper: "Dismantling Racism and Militarism in U.S. Foreign Policy," written by Salih Booker of the Center for International Policy (CIP) and Diana Ohlbaum of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL). The paper outlines a vision for a new role for the U.S. in the world that would repudiate racism and militarism. The vision is based on our common humanity, justice, peace, equality, dignity, shared wealth, and sustainability. I commend it. The 38-page paper can be found on both the CIP and FCNL websites. (www.fcnl.org/drmreport) **Rich Van Dellen**, Rochester

You can't fix Facebook ... but signing off is easy

Maybe Facebook can't be fixed. Did anyone ever think of that? As a whistleblower releases damning information, as Congress holds another hearing into the harm the company does, the implicit assumption is that the social-media giant can be reformed, that with the right combination of algorithmic tweaks and legislative remedies, it can cease being a malevolent force. Even whistleblower Frances Haugen says that her aim in giving a trove of embarrassing internal documents to the Wall Street Journal was not to harm Facebook, but to fix it.



LEONARD PITTS

But can that really be done? There is reason to doubt. In a 1999 interview with the Miami Herald, Steve Lubar, a curator of the Smithsonian Museum of American History, made a trenchant observation. Namely, that we are wired to believe what has never been true, i.e., that talking to one another brings us together. "There's this sense," he said, "that new and better communications technology will bring about world peace. How can we disagree with each other if we all can talk to each other?" That belief, he said, has accompanied every leap in communications tech from radio, to television to the internet. "It goes back to before the Civil War," said Lubar. "[Some people wondered,] 'How can there be a Civil War if the North and the South have telegraph lines?'" The ability to communicate broadly, we believe, unites us across barriers, cements our bonds as a human family. Small wonder that's how many of us once saw Facebook – and indeed, how it markets itself. Smaller wonder that it failed. The expectation was not realistic and never has been. Which is not to absolve Facebook of its sins. The Journal report depicts a company that harmed people, that knew from its own research that it harmed people and that did precious little to stop harming people. This, while cosplaying as a responsible corporate citizen that only wants to help you share your cat pictures. Too bad the facts, as reported by

the Journal, say otherwise. They say that Instagram, owned by Facebook, exacerbates eating disorders, depression and isolation in teenage girls, and the company knew this, but played it down. They say that drug cartels, human traffickers and ethnic cleansers use Facebook to conduct their dirty business and that the company knows this, but does little to stop it. They say Facebook is a superspreader of misinformation that helped enable the Jan. 6 insurrection and that the company resisted making changes to more effectively address the issue for fear of hurting the bottom line. This is a trillion-dollar behemoth whose customer base is roughly 40 percent of the human race and it has consistently shirked the responsibility that comes with its power, refused to let what was right stand between it and the next dollar. So yes, one hopes lawmakers will impose consequences. But one is also realistic about how much good that can do. Which is to say, a limited amount. For as long as we are predisposed to consider mass connectivity the key to a better world, there is ultimately no law that can provide fail-safe protection against the unsavory aspects of this medium. Like tobacco, Facebook is a dangerous product one uses at one's own risk. It's worth noting, however, that tobacco use in this country declined not just because it was regulated, but also because people became educated to its perils. Maybe you can't fix Facebook. But signing off is a breeze.

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OTHER VIEW

We repeat: Vaccines save seniors' lives

Reminder to Floridians: COVID vaccines work. In case we all needed to be told yet again, a report from the Department of Health and Human Services says COVID vaccines likely saved 2,400 seniors from death, many more – 6,700 – from hospitalization in Florida and about 17,000 from infection. We should be dancing in the street at that wonderful news. Imagine if we could say that about cancer deaths or some other horrible illness. And Florida was among three states, along with California and Texas, that benefited the most from the vaccine shots. The study, which used Medicare claims and county-level vaccination data from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to make

the projections, also came up with another important point: Seniors benefited from an overall high vaccination rate throughout the population – not only within their age group. That's common sense, of course. We only have about 67% of of the state population vaccinated with at least one dose, and about 58% fully vaccinated. And the rate of vaccines being administered has once again slowed, now that the terrible summer surge is heading back down. So let's recap. The more people who get vaccinated, the better we protect everyone – and especially our elders. Do we need to say it again? Apparently, that answer is Yes. © 2021 Miami Herald. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency LLC.