

I have always thought it important for people who write articles or columns over time, especially those who regularly express opinions within them, to freely admit when they are opening in a manner inconsistent with something they have said in the past. So here goes. Yes, I have often noted that I love the fact that here in South Dakota we have 4 very different seasons. We move regularly and annually from July's blistering hot to January's 'Uh oh, I can't feel my face' and I love the contrast.

That having been said, however, I cannot say that I enjoy blizzards on the 25th of April. I certainly don't want to blame the meteorologists for the stark contrast between the weather predicted and the weather actual for, after all, weather forecasting is not yet an exact science. Besides, I do think we made the right call last Friday, starting school when the snow was to be somewhere between flurries and 3 inches and closing it early when it became clear that we were in for far more (14 inches?) than the limits of safety would allow.

Frankly, I don't blame anybody. But I am getting slightly piqued, nevertheless. The source is the comments that people send my way after a weather closure. There are usually three types of such remarks that can be annoying. The first is along the lines of 'Boy, as it turned out, you sure could have had school.' I don't mind that one so much. After all, a missed day of school can always be made up. Nothing is really lost in this situation. The second is a bit more trying. "Don't you think you should have let out for that one?" I can't help but wonder how they saw the situation beforehand; they always seem to know exactly what I should have done *after the fact*. I notice that none of the local stockbrokers ever offer me this remark.

But perhaps the worst was the comment I heard late Friday morning from a dozen or so people. "Oh, well, at least we don't have to make this one up." They could literally test sphygmomanometers on me after a remark like that—if it doesn't register a 10 point increase in my blood pressure, then it's broken.

Here's why. Last year, the Mitchell School District spent \$13,691,033 in the general fund to run our public schools. While some of those expenses are borne outside the school year, they are all spent in order to provide the educational program for the school year. That means we spend \$78,684.10 per day of school (not even counting capital outlay, special education, food service, or pension monies) or about \$11,240 per hour. In other words, school is an expensive thing to provide to the children of our community. I don't particularly mind missing a day of school because we always make those up. But tradition in education is that the time lost to a day shortened by a late start or an early out is simply not made up. While the amount of education lost on Friday's early out is hard to measure, the cost of that education is not. It is \$53,390.

And even that is not the worst of it. Saying "Oh, well, at least we don't have to make this one up" implies that a day of school is a bad thing, something to be avoided if at all possible. It's something a prisoner would say whose paddy wagon delivering him to the

penitentiary breaks down and gets him there a day late. “Oh, well, it still counts toward my sentence.” Imagine waking up one morning at your regular hour and finding that you hadn’t just slept through the night, you had slept through the night, the next day, and the following night. Would you really say, “Whew, I slept through that whole day; that’s one I won’t have to live through.” Imagine going to the grocery store and buying a bag of Doritos. You take them up to the counter and the checker, after taking your money, opens the bag and takes out a handful and starts munching on them, explaining, “Here, I’ll help you out so you won’t have to eat all these.”

If you’re wondering what the difference is between these scenarios, it is the perception of the person toward the thing lost. If you value the thing, losing it is a bad thing. If you don’t value it, then losing it is OK, even something to be upbeat about.

Education, at whatever school you receive it, is a good thing, not a bad one. This is something we should all recognize. The opposite view may be a big part of the reason that the high school drop-out rate in some large American cities now exceeds 50%. The opposite view is not one shared by the people of India and China, two countries whose economies are now competing strongly with our own.

Sixty-two years ago, Richard Weaver wrote a small but very powerful book, entitled Ideas have Consequences. He was right, of course. Here’s the idea: school is important. It’s more important than rap and pop music. It’s more important than celebrities. It’s more important than parties. It’s more important than socializing. It’s more important than leisure. Since before America was founded as a country, Americans have recognized that education is a ticket to success, for the individual, the family, the community, and the nation.

While I recognize that many of the people who tease me about a ‘free’ day off do so in fun and good humor, I sometimes fear that the joke is being passed onto our young people and that the joke may, ultimately, be on us.