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OPINION

Indiana's Law: A Fire Of The Moment?

The mushrooming controversy surrounding Indiana's religious freedom law right now could have theoretically been South Dakota's fate last year had our legislators given their approval to a similar measure.

We have no way of knowing this, but the best guess is that such a decision here probably wouldn't have sparked the same angry firestorm that is engulfing Indiana currently.

Our state lawmakers killed a bill which would have created a legal excuse to effectively allow discrimination against, for instance, a same-sex couple wishing to purchase a wedding cake from a baker who was not real supportive of that lifestyle. While the measure didn't specify which group(s) could be impacted by the religious judgments of others, the bill — in root terms — had one group in mind with one purpose in mind: to legally maintain a second-class citizenry.

Frankly, it was an unfortunate piece of legislation and was wisely defeated.

Indiana has not been so wise — or lucky.

Critics of the measure say Indiana's law is slightly different from similar laws that 19 states already have in place, or from the much narrower federal law it avers to copy. According to *The Atlantic*, the Indiana law allows "any for-profit business to assert a right to 'the free exercise of religion.'" Other language seems to legally equate a for-profit business with a church organization, which can cite its religious convictions on rather obvious grounds. (It still sounds a lot like the South Dakota proposal to us.)

A decade ago, such a law would have been called a "values" issue and probably would have drawn far less overall attention.

But these are different times, and ours is a different world.

However, because South Dakota went through a very similar debate recently, the current outcry over Indiana's law seems somewhat overheated. This law is, broadly speaking, a variation from other laws on the books elsewhere. The analyses into why it's different — and therefore more dangerous — dig into subtle alterations in legislative wording, which, while not unimportant, is the kind of thing that normally doesn't excite and motivate the public in general to this extent.

Instead, this law seems to have arrived at a pivotal moment in the evolution of the same-sex rights issue and in the argument over religious freedom in America. It draws a line in the sand that's been drawn before, but this time, the pushback has been far more vigorous, the consequences of which were clearly underestimated by those who conceived of this legislation.

Thus, what's happening in Indiana may be more about a new social status quo and serve as a new litmus test for human rights, personal dignity and/or religious liberty.

How it ends will be important. But one has to worry that the road is going to get a lot bumpier and angrier before it ever soothes over.

kmh

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The View page provides a forum for open discussion of issues and interests affecting our readers. Initialed editorials represent the opinion of the writer, but not necessarily that of the PRESS & DAKOTAN.

Bylined columns represent the view of the author. We welcome letters on current topics. Questions regarding the Views page should be directed to Kelly Hertz at kelly.hertz@yankton.net/.

IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, April 1, the 91st day of 2015. There are 274 days left in the year. This is April Fool's Day.

Today's Highlight in History: On April 1, 1945, American forces launched the amphibious invasion of Okinawa during World War II. (U.S. forces succeeded in capturing the Japanese island on June 22.)

On this date: In 1789, the U.S. House of Representatives held its first full meeting in New York; Frederick Muhlenberg of Pennsylvania was elected the first House speaker.

In 1815, Prussian/German statesman Otto von Bismarck was born in Schoenhhausen.

In 1865, during the Civil War, Union forces led by Maj. Gen. Philip Sheridan routed Confederate soldiers under the command of Maj. Gen. George Pickett in the Battle of Five Forks in Virginia.

In 1924, Adolf Hitler was sentenced to five years in prison for his role in the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich. (Hitler was released in Dec. 1924; during his time behind bars, he wrote his autobiographical screed, "Mein Kampf.")

In 1933, Nazi Germany staged a day-long national boycott of Jewish-owned businesses.

In 1954, the United States Air Force Academy was established by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

In 1962, the Katherine Anne Porter novel "Ship of Fools," an allegory about the rise of Nazism in Germany, was published by Little, Brown & Co. on April Fool's Day.

In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon signed a measure banning cigarette advertising on radio and television, to take effect after Jan. 1, 1971.

In 1972, the first Major League Baseball players' strike began; it lasted 12 days.

In 1975, with Khmer Rouge guerrillas closing in, Cambodian President Lon Nol resigned and fled into exile, spending the rest of his life in the United States.

In 1984, recording star Marvin Gaye was shot to death by his father, Marvin Gay Sr. in Los Angeles, the day before his 45th birthday. (The elder Gay pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter, and received probation.)

In 1992, the National Hockey League Players' Association went on its first-ever strike, which lasted 10 days.

Ten years ago: The Vatican reported

that Pope John Paul II was near death, his breathing shallow and his heart and kidneys failing. President Bill Clinton's former national security adviser, Sandy Berger, pleaded guilty to sneaking classified documents out of the National Archives; he was later sentenced to two years' probation.

Five years ago: Roman Catholic cardinals across Europe used their Holy Thursday sermons to defend Pope Benedict XVI from accusations he'd played a role in covering up sex abuse scandals. Dayton denied the previous year's national champs another title as the Flyers beat North Carolina 79-68 to win the NIT. Actor John Forsythe, 92, died in Santa Ynez, California.

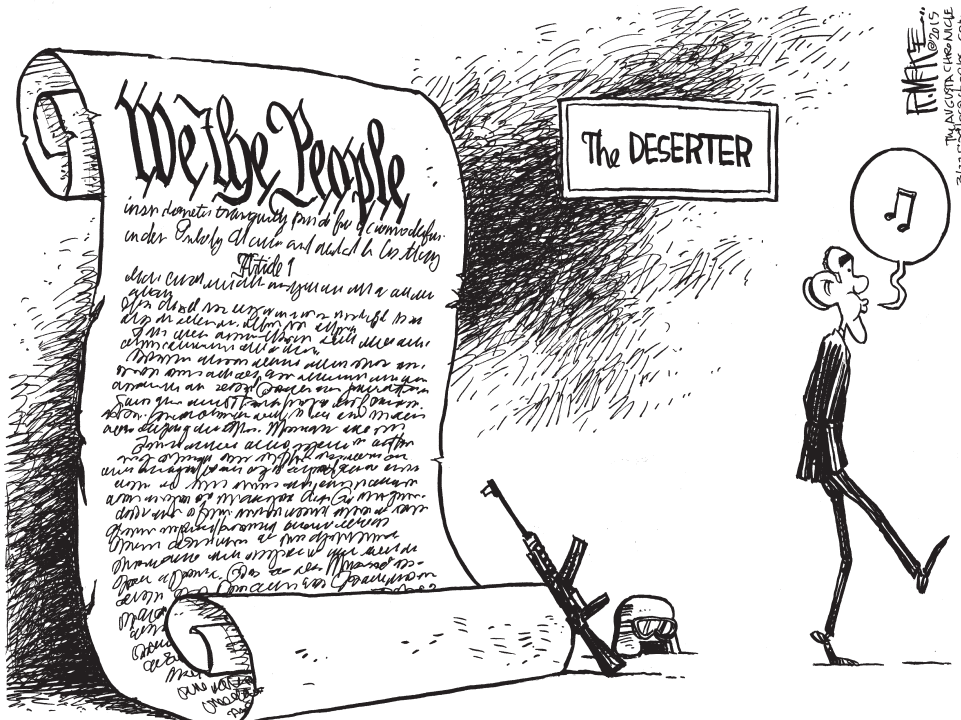
One year ago: Mocking his critics, President Barack Obama boasted that 7.1 million people had signed up for his health care law, and said "the debate over repealing this law is over." Congress demanded answers from General Motors new CEO, Mary Barra, on why the automaker had taken 10 years to recall cars with a faulty ignition switch linked at that time to 13 traffic deaths; Barra acknowledged that the company took too long to act.

Today's Birthdays: Actress Jane Powell is 86. Actress Grace Lee Whitney is 85. Actress Debbie Reynolds is 83. Country singer Jim Ed Brown is 81. Actor Don Hastings is 81. Baseball Hall of Famer Phil Niekro is 76. Actress Ali MacGraw is 76. Rhythm-and-blues singer Rudolph Isley is 76. Baseball All-Star Rusty Staub is 71. Reggae singer Jimmy Cliff is 67. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito is 65. Rock musician Billy Currie (Ultravox) is 65. Actress Annette O'Toole is 63. Movie director Barry Sonnenfeld is 62. Singer Susan Boyle is 54. Actor Jose Zuniga is 53. Country singer Woody Lee is 47. Actress Jessica Collins is 44. Rapper-actor Method Man is 44. Movie directors Albert and Allen Hughes are 43. Political commentator Rachel Maddow is 42. Tennis player Magdalena Maleeva is 40. Actor David Oyelowo is 39. Singer Bijou Phillips is 35. Actor Sam Huntington is 33. Comedian-actor Taran Killam is 33. Actor Matt Lanter is 32. Actor Josh Zuckerman is 30. Country singer Hillary Scott (Lady Antebellum) is 29. Actor Asa Butterfield is 18.

Thought for Today: "The only sin is mediocrity." — Martha Graham, American modern dance pioneer (born 1894, died this date in 1991).

FROM THE BIBLE

Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. Psalm 82:4. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.



The Working Poor And The Non-Working Rich

BY ROBERT B. REICH

Tribune Content Agency

Many believe that poor people deserve to be poor because they're lazy. As House Speaker John Boehner has said, the poor have a notion that "I really don't have to work. I don't really want to do this. I think I'd rather just sit around."

In reality, a large and growing share of the nation's poor work full time — sometimes 60 or more hours a week — yet still don't earn enough to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

It's also commonly believed, especially among Republicans, that the rich deserve their wealth because they work harder than others.

In reality, a large and growing portion of the super-rich have never broken a sweat. Their wealth has been handed to them.

The rise of these two groups — the working poor and non-working rich — is relatively new. Both are challenging the core American assumptions that people are paid what they're worth, and work is justly rewarded.

Why are these two groups growing? The ranks of the working poor are growing because wages at the bottom have dropped, adjusted for inflation. With increasing numbers of Americans taking low-paying jobs in retail sales, restaurants, hotels, hospitals, child care, elder care and other personal services, the pay of the bottom fifth is falling closer to the minimum wage.

At the same time, the real value of the federal minimum wage is lower today than it was a quarter century ago.

In addition, most recipients of public assistance must now work in order to qualify.

Bill Clinton's welfare reform of 1996 pushed the poor off welfare and into work. Meanwhile, the Earned Income Tax Credit, a wage subsidy, has emerged as the nation's largest anti-poverty program. Here, too, having a job is a prerequisite.

The new work requirements haven't reduced the number or percentage of Americans in poverty. They've just moved poor people from being unemployed and impoverished to being employed and impoverished.

While poverty declined in the early years of welfare reform when the economy boomed and jobs were plentiful, it began growing in 2000. By 2012, it exceeded its level in 1996, when welfare ended.

At the same time, the ranks of the non-working rich have been swelling. America's legendary "self-made" men and women are fast being replaced by wealthy heirs.

Six of today's 10 wealthiest Americans are heirs to prominent fortunes. The Walmart heirs alone have more wealth than the bottom 40 percent of Americans combined.

Americans who became enormously wealthy over the last three decades are now busily transferring that wealth to their children and grandchildren.

The nation is on the cusp of the largest inter-generational transfer of wealth in his-



Robert B. REICH

tory. A study by the Boston College Center on Wealth and Philanthropy projects a total of \$59 trillion passed down to heirs between 2007 and 2061.

As the French economist Thomas Piketty reminds us, this is the kind of dynastic wealth that's kept Europe's aristocracy going for centuries. It's about to become the major source of income for a new American aristocracy.

The tax code encourages all this by favoring unearned income over earned income.

The top tax rate paid by America's wealthy on their capital gains — the major source of income for the non-working rich — has dropped from 33 percent in the late 1980s to 20 percent today, putting it substantially below the top tax rate on ordinary income (36.9 percent).

If the owners of capital assets whose worth increases over their lifetime hold them until death, their heirs pay zero capital gains taxes on them. Such "unrealized" gains now account for more than half the value of assets held by estates worth more than \$100 million.

At the same time, the estate tax has been slashed. Before George W. Bush was president, it applied to assets in excess of \$2 million per couple at a rate of 55 percent. Now it kicks in at \$10,680,000 per couple, at a 40 percent rate. Last year only 1.4 out of every 1,000 estates owed any estate tax, and the effective rate they paid was only 17 percent.

Republicans now in control of Congress want to go even further. Last Friday the Senate voted 54-46 in favor of a non-binding resolution to repeal the estate tax altogether. Earlier in the week, the House Ways and Means Committee also voted for a repeal. The House is expected to vote in coming weeks.

Yet the specter of an entire generation doing nothing for their money other than speed-dialing their wealth management advisers is not particularly attractive. It puts more and more responsibility for investing a substantial portion of the nation's assets into the hands of people who have never worked. It also endangers our democracy, as dynastic wealth inevitably and invariably accumulates political influence and power.

Consider the rise of both the working poor and the non-working rich, and the meritocratic ideal on which America's growing inequality is often justified doesn't hold up.

That widening inequality — combined with the increasing numbers of people who work full time but are still impoverished and of others who have never worked and are fabulously wealthy — is undermining the moral foundations of American capitalism.

Robert Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley and Senior Fellow at the Blum Center for Developing Economies. His new film, "Inequality for All," is now out on Netflix, iTunes and Amazon.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Great Tournament

Todd Larson, Yankton
SE Region Special Olympics Basketball Tournament Director

Yankton volunteers were awesome again as the City hosted the SE Regional Basketball Tournament at the Summit Activities Center on Saturday, Feb. 21. The 2015 tournament was organized by the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Thank you to all the volunteers who helped officiate, scorekeep, run the clocks and work at all the different events taking place on that Saturday. Thank you to the following people and groups who made the tournament a success: Byron Williams, Yankton High School Special Events Staff; Sheila Woodward, recruited and organized all officials, scorekeepers and clock keepers; Hailey Baugh for singing the National Anthem; Troop 102 of the local Boy Scouts for presenting the colors during the opening ceremonies and helping with

the individual skills contest; Pastor Rick Slatery for the invocation; Jim Ryan for reading the athlete's oath; Jared Drotzman from the Yankton County EMS for medical coverage; the Yankton Police Department for handing out awards; the Yankton High School Cheerleaders for administering the cheer competition; and a huge thank you to the Yankton Knights of Columbus for providing lunches to 400 athletes and 215 coaches and leaders.

If anyone was missed, I apologize. But again, thank you, Yankton, for making this tournament a shining star in the state.

Income Opportunity?

Rita Eckmann, Bloomfield, Neb.

I just thought of a way to bring down the national debt. Why not fine everyone who continually says "you know" when attempting to express a thought?

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." — The FIRST AMENDMENT to the U.S. Constitution

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS: It's Your Right To Know!