

The Press & Dakotan

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OPINION

Dry Times And Nagging Dangers

Unfortunately, that didn't last long: Yankton County's burn ban, which was lifted late last week as the countryside finally began showing its springtime green, was re-imposed late Monday night after a busy day of controlled burns that got out of control.

Some people now may be questioning why the ban was lifted at all, given that there hadn't been much rain in the days leading up to the decision.

However, one can't dismiss the fact that springtime is something of a season of fire across the farmlands.

Controlled burns are a ritual in the Midwest, as farmers prepare for the upcoming season by clearing out some of the weedy growth that has occupied pastures, ditches other pieces of land. In some ways, it's functionally the same thing as prescribed burning that is done in state and federal parks. It's a way to clear out the old in order to prepare for the new.

As such, there is a pressure to get this process done, and that's something that emergency management planners have to bear in mind when determining whether to impose — or lift — a burn ban.

Arguably, Yankton County may have gambled a bit when it lifted its ban, but it seemed like a reasonable move at the time. However, there was higher humidity and cooler conditions, as well as the greening of what had been combustible dormant vegetation.

One must also note that when the ban was lifted last week, Emergency Management Director Paul Scherschligt did say that conditions were still very dry and landowners should use caution when undertaking controlled burns. That was a fair warning.

Alas, it didn't rain too much in most of Yankton County and other parts of the area (although there were reports of 2-4 inches of rain in the Olivet-Menno area during thunderstorms late Friday night) and the weekend breezes helped to dry off whatever did fall.

The dangers of the dry conditions manifested themselves Monday, even when cautious steps were taken. In one case, it was reported that a controlled burn was monitored carefully, but during a brief interval between inspections by the landowner, the wind momentarily switched directions and the fire took off.

Such a small thing magnifies the need for caution in these dry times. There is a lot of danger in the countryside, even when a burn ban is technically lifted. It's a handy reminder to be mindful of the threat until the rains finally take care of the issue.

kmh

P&D LETTER POLICY

The **PRESS & DAKOTAN** invites its readers to write letters to the editor. We ask that a few simple guidelines be followed:

- Please limit letters to 300 words or less. Letters should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind.
- In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the **PRESS & DAKOTAN** will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses.
- Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.
- Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail to: Letters, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078, drop off at 319 Walnut in Yankton, fax to 665-1721 or email us at kelly.hertz@yankton.net/.

IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
Today is Wednesday, April 29, the 119th day of 2015. There are 246 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:
On April 29, 1945, during World War II, American soldiers liberated the Dachau concentration camp. Adolf Hitler married Eva Braun inside his "Führerbunker" and designated Adm. Karl Doenitz president.
On this date: In 1429, Joan of Arc entered the besieged city of Orleans to lead a French victory over the English.
In 1798, Joseph Haydn's oratorio "The Creation" was rehearsed in Vienna, Austria, before an invited audience.
In 1861, the Maryland House of Delegates voted 53-13 against seceding from the Union. In Montgomery, Alabama, President Jefferson Davis asked the Confederate Congress for the authority to wage war.

In 1913, Swedish-born engineer Gideon Sundback of Hoboken, New Jersey, received a U.S. patent for a "separable fastener" — later known as the zipper.
In 1946, 28 former Japanese officials went on trial in Tokyo as war criminals; seven ended up being sentenced to death.
In 1957, the SM-1, the first military nuclear power plant, was dedicated at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.
In 1968, the counterculture musical "Hair" opened on Broadway following limited engagements off-Broadway.
In 1974, President Richard M. Nixon announced he was releasing edited transcripts of some secretly made White House tape recordings related to Watergate.
In 1983, Harold Washington was sworn in as the first black mayor of Chicago.
In 1992, rioting resulting in 55 deaths erupted in Los Angeles after a jury in Simi Valley, California, acquitted four Los Angeles police officers of almost all state charges in the videotaped beating of Rodney King.
In 1993, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II announced that for the first time, Buckingham Palace would be opened to tourists to help raise money for repairs at fire-damaged Windsor Castle.
In 2011, Britain's Prince William and Kate Middleton were married in an opulent ceremony at London's Westminster Abbey.
Ten years ago: Insurgents unleashed a series of car bombings and other attacks across Iraq, killing at least 41 people, including three U.S. soldiers. NASA again delayed the first space shuttle launch since the Columbia disaster, worrying that ice falling off fuel tank could doom Discovery.
Five years ago: Louisiana Gov. Bob by Lindal declared a state of emergency in the face of the worsening oil spill in the

Gulf of Mexico. The U.S. Navy officially ended a ban on women serving on submarines, saying the first females would be reporting for duty by 2012. A knife-wielding man slashed 29 children and three teachers at a school in eastern China (the assailant was executed a month later). The NCAA's Board of Directors approved a 68-team format for the men's basketball tournament beginning the next season.
One year ago: President Barack Obama ended a four-country swing through Asia and headed for home from the Philippines. Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling was banned for life by the NBA in response to racist comments he'd made in an audio recording. A botched execution using a disputed new drug combination left Oklahoma death row inmate Clayton Lockett writhing and clenching his teeth on the gurney, leading prison officials to halt the proceedings before his death from a heart attack. Walter R. Walsh, 106, who captured gangsters as an FBI agent in the 1930s and went on to train Marine snipers and become the longest-lived Olympian, died in Arlington, Virginia. Al Feldstein, 88, whose 28 years at Mad Magazine transformed the satirical publication into a cultural institution, died in Livingston, Montana. British actor Bob Hoskins, 71, died in London.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Keith Baxter is 82. Bluesman Otis Rush is 80. Conductor Zubin Mehta is 79. Disgraced financier Bernard Madoff is 77. Pop singer Bob Miranda (The Happenings) is 73. Country singer Duane Allen (The Oak Ridge Boys) is 72. Singer Tommy James is 68. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., is 65. Movie director Phillip Noyce is 65. Country musician Wayne Secrest (Confederate Railroad) is 65. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld is 61. Actor Leslie Jordan is 60. Actress Kate Mulgrew is 60. Actor Daniel Day-Lewis is 58. Actress Michelle Pfeiffer is 57. Actress Eve Plumb is 57. Rock musician Phil King is 55. Country singer Stephanie Bentley is 52. Actor Vincent Ventresca is 49. Singer Carrie Wilson (Wilson Phillips) is 47. Actor Paul Adelstein is 46. Actress Uma Thurman is 45. Tennis player Andre Agassi is 45. Rapper Master P is 45. Actor Darby Stanchfield is 44. Country singer James Bonamy is 43. Gospel/rhythm-and-blues singer Erica Campbell (Mary Mary) is 43. Rock musician Mike Hogan (The Cranberries) is 42. Actor Tyler Labine is 37. Actress Megan Boone is 32. Actress-model Taylor Cole is 31. Actor Zane Carney is 30. Pop singer Amy Heidemann (Karrin) is 29. Pop singer Foxes is 26.

Thought for Today: "An education isn't how much you have committed to memory, or even how much you know. It's being able to differentiate between what you know and what you don't." — Anatole France, French author and critic (1844-1924).

FROM THE BIBLE

For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. 2 Chronicles 16:26. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.



Why So Many Of Us Feel Powerless

BY ROBERT B. REICH
Tribune Content Agency

A security guard recently told me he didn't know how much he'd be earning from week to week because his firm kept changing his schedule and his pay. "They just don't care," he said.

A traveler I met in the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport last week said she'd been there eight hours, but the airline responsible for her trip wouldn't help her find another flight leaving that evening. "They don't give a hoot," she said.

Someone I met in North Carolina a few weeks ago told me he had stopped voting because elected officials don't respond to what average people like him think or want. "They don't listen," he said.

What connects these dots? As I travel around America, I'm struck by how utterly powerless most people feel.

The companies we work for, the businesses we buy from and the political system we participate in all seem to have grown less accountable. I hear it over and over: They don't care; our voices don't count.

A large part of the reason is we have fewer choices than we used to have. In almost every area of our lives, it's now take it or leave it.

Companies are treating workers as disposable cogs because most working people have no choice. They need work and must take what they can get.

Although jobs are coming back from the depths of the Great Recession, the portion of the labor force actually working remains lower than it's been in more than 30 years — before vast numbers of middle-class wives and mothers entered paid work. Which is why corporations can get away with firing workers without warning, replacing full-time jobs with part-time and contract work, and cutting wages. Most working people have no alternative.

Consumers, meanwhile, are feeling mistreated and taken for granted because they, too, have less choice.

U.S. airlines, for example, have consolidated into a handful of giant carriers that divide up routes and collude on fares. In 2005, the U.S. had nine major airlines. Now we have just four.

It's much the same across the economy. Eighty percent of Americans are served by just one Internet service provider — usually Comcast, AT&T or Time Warner.

The biggest banks have become far bigger. In 1990, the five biggest held just 10 percent of all banking assets. Now they hold almost 45 percent.

Giant health insurers are larger; the giant hospital chains, far bigger; the most powerful digital platforms (Amazon, Facebook, Google), gigantic.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Internet Danger

Kim Dale, Yankton
For more than 20 years, I've been online doing a wide variety of things, from work to play. When my grandchildren came along, I taught them how to use the computer. We would go to little game sites for kids that were safe.

But now, there is at least one game site for kids 8-14 that is probably one of the most unsafe web site I've ever seen for this age group. They brag about how safe it is. But as the site has evolved, safety is no longer true.

First there is hacking. When a child sees this happening in a game, they want to learn how to do it, too. And the offenders are more than happy to share with others the methods they use to cheat in the games. This company held a hack-a-thon a year or two ago, which shows you how little they care if kids hack or not.

Secondly, the vulgar language used by kids on this site is beyond obscene. They advertise safe chat, but in reality it blocks out all words EXCEPT the bad.

I have been complaining to this company

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Robert B. REICH

All this means less consumer choice, which translates into less power.

Our complaints go nowhere. Often we can't even find a real person to complain to. Automated telephone menus go on interminably.

Finally, as voters we feel no one is listening because politicians, too, face less and less competition. Over 85 percent of congressional districts are considered "safe" for their incumbents in the upcoming 2016 election, according to FairVote; only 3 percent are toss-ups. In presidential elections, only a handful of states are now considered "battlegrounds" that could go either Democratic or Republican.

So, naturally, that's where the candidates campaign. Voters in most states won't see much of them. These voters' votes are literally taken for granted.

Even in toss-up districts and battleground states, so much big money is flowing in that average voters feel disenfranchised.

In all these respects, powerlessness comes from a lack of meaningful choice. Big institutions don't have to be responsive to us because we can't penalize them by going to a competitor.

And we have no loud countervailing voice forcing them to listen.

Fifty years ago, a third of private-sector workers belonged to labor unions. This gave workers bargaining power to get a significant share of the economy's gains along with better working conditions — and a voice. Now, fewer than 7 percent of private-sector workers are unionized.

In the 1960s, a vocal consumer movement demanded safe products, low prices and anti-trust actions against monopolies and business collusion. Now, the consumer movement has become muted.

Decades ago, political parties had strong local and state roots that gave politically active citizens a voice in party platforms and nominees. Now, the two major political parties have morphed into giant national fundraising machines.

Our economy and society depend on most people feeling that the system is working for them.

But a growing sense of powerlessness in all aspects of our lives — as workers, consumers and voters — is convincing most people that the system is working only for those at the top.

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.

Rushmore Designs?

Rita Eckmann, Bloomfield, Neb.
I've just heard that President Obama is planning a visit South Dakota if this is true, a special patrol must be put on Mount Rushmore or our president might add his face to the Shrine of Democracy.