

THE PRESS & DAKOTAN

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OPINION | OUR VIEW

Homecoming: A Liability Issue

The Yankton School District's efforts to add some safeguards to its homecoming parade festivities is apparently running into roadblocks.

On Monday night, the School Board tabled proposals that were proposed by a task force that studied the parade's safety. This came about after students were injured in the last two years.

The proposals included not allowing students — except the homecoming royalty — to ride on floats, and no longer allowing the building of homeroom floats for the parade. Under the new guidelines, the students would be allowed to walk within a safe proximity of whatever entries were in the parade.

These ideas were made public last week, and since then, there has reportedly been some pushback from the public on the proposals. Thus, the School Board chose on Monday night to wait until its September meeting to make a final decision. That would still allow for enough time to make changes or to proceed as usual on Yankton High School's 2013 homecoming parade.

What's happening here is the time-honored collision between tradition and change. Tradition, of course, is the immovable force, solidified by years of practice and devotion. But change truly is the irresistible object, and it usually wins out by some measure over tradition in the long run.

For our part, we love tradition but we also understand change.

We see why so many people cling to the YHS homecoming ritual of parading through the streets on the Friday afternoon of homecoming week. The practice allows students to generate something wonderful and wild that can crawl down the parade route; the kids on the floats usually look like they are having as much fun as the crowd, which clearly enjoys the parade.

But we understand the change, which in this case is rooted in legal practicality. That's not particularly fun, but neither are liability issues or even a lawsuit — or so the worst-case scenario being envisioned here would suggest.

The only practical way to preserve the homecoming tradition and address the concerns of change is for the parade's participants to sign waivers before they can take part in the event. These waivers would most likely exempt the school district and/or the operators of the vehicles in the parade (usually teachers) from any liability concerns that may arise should some sort of incident similar to what has taken place the previous two years occurs. Let's face it, when these people agree to drive in the parade, they are putting themselves at legal risk. They need and deserve some sort of protection. Arguing otherwise really makes a case for doing away with the parade altogether.

For now, a waiver is the only reasonable approach here. It may not be a perfect answer and likely doesn't handle all the liability issues that might crop up, but it's a start. It recognizes that there are risks involved for many people on many levels, and it helps reconcile the forces of tradition and change as it maintains this highlight activity of the school year.

kmh

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, Aug. 14, the 226th day of 2013. There are 139 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On August 14, 1945, President Harry S. Truman announced that Japan had surrendered unconditionally, ending World War II.

On this date: In 1848, the Oregon Territory was created.

In 1908, a race riot erupted in Springfield, Ill., as a white mob began setting black-owned homes and businesses on fire; at least two blacks and five whites were killed in the violence.

In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law.

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill issued the Atlantic Charter, a statement of principles that renounced aggression.

In 1947, Pakistan became independent of British rule.

In 1951, newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst, 88, died in Beverly Hills, Calif.

In 1962, robbers held up a U.S. mail truck in Plymouth, Mass., making off with more than \$1.5 million; the loot was never recovered.

In 1963, playwright Clifford Odets, 57, died in Los Angeles.

In 1969, British troops went to Northern Ireland to intervene in sectarian violence between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

In 1973, U.S. bombing of Cambodia came to a halt.

In 1993, Pope John Paul II denounced abortion and euthanasia as well as sexual abuse by American priests in a speech at McNichols Sports Arena in Denver.

In 1997, an unrepentant Timothy McVeigh was formally sentenced to death for the Oklahoma City bombing.

Ten years ago: A huge blackout hit the northeastern United States and part of Canada; 50 million people lost power. The chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, Roy Moore, said he would not remove a Ten Commandments monument from the state judicial building, defying a federal court order to remove the granite monument. Rebels lifted their siege of Liberia's capital.

Five years ago: President George W. Bush signed consumer-safety legislation that banned lead from children's toys, imposing the toughest standard in the world.

One year ago: Vice President Joe Biden sparked a campaign commotion, telling an audience in southern Virginia that included hundreds of black voters that Republican Mitt Romney wanted to put them "back in chains" by deregulating Wall Street. (Biden later mocked Republican criticism over the remark while conceding he'd meant to use different words.) Ron Palillo, the actor best known as the nerdy high school student Arnold Horshack on the 1970s sitcom "Welcome Back, Kotter," died in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., at age 63.

Today's Birthdays: Broadway lyricist Lee Adams ("Bye Bye Birdie") is 89. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Russell Baker is 88. Singer Buddy Greco is 87. College Football Hall of Famer John Brodie is 78. Singer Dash Crofts is 75. Rock singer David Crosby is 72. Country singer Connie Smith is 72. Comedian-actor Steve Martin is 68. Actor Antonio Fargas is 67. Singer-musician Larry Graham is 67. Actress Susan Saint James is 67. Actor David Schramm is 67. Author Danielle Steel is 66. Rock singer-musician Terry Adams (NRBQ) is 63. "Far Side" cartoonist Gary Larson is 63. Actor Carl Lumbly is 62. Olympic gold medal swimmer Debbie Meyer is 61. Film composer James Horner is 60. Actress Jackie Harty is 57. Actress Marcia Gay Harden is 54. Basketball Hall of Famer Earvin "Magic" Johnson is 54. Singer Sarah Brightman is 53. Actress Susan Olsen is 52. Actress-turned-fashion-interior designer Cristy Conaway is 49. Rock musician Keith Howland (Chicago) is 49. Actress Halle Berry is 47. Actress Catherine Bell is 45. Country musician Cody McCraver (Confederate Railroad) is 45. Rock musician Kevin Cadogan is 43. Actor Scott Michael Campbell is 42. Actress Lalanya Masters is 41. Actor Christopher Gorham is 39. Actress Mila Kunis is 30. TV personality Spencer Pratt is 30. NFL quarterback Tim Tebow is 26.

Thought for Today: "The old forget. The young don't know." — Japanese proverb.

FROM THE BIBLE

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 2 Corinthians 3:12. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

YOUR LETTERS

Capone's Tale

Kathleen Flow, Angie Nash-Beaudette, Barb Steinberg, Judy Heffle, Mike Steinberg, Patty Squyres, Rex C. Squyres, Bob Rhode

We Yanktonians are upset. Recent allegations against Yankton's animal control officer and police department didn't added up. (*Press & Dakotan*, July 24) We decided to take a closer look into these events. This is our investigation of the alleged abuse and neglect of a pitbull-type dog known as "Capone."

"Capone" was owned, registered and vaccinated in Yankton. This canine's trademark for escape had landed him "in jail" 4-5 times, prior to the February incident. The owner was warned to secure the dog. Capone and animal

control had always had positive interactions.

February, first week: Capone was a playful, fun-loving dog. Second week: Capone turned on his handlers. He became aggressive, charging the officer, raging and snarling, shredding a water hose, and throwing bowls and bedding. It ended with one angry dog and one injured human requiring emergency medical treatment.

Capone was put on bite hold. Capone's court date arrived mid-March. His owner, the city attorney and officer (who was bitten), with the judge, came to an agreement. Capone was released to his owner if he was removed permanently from the Yankton area.

One week after Capone's release, he was picked up.

Capone was "held" without "bail" for three months, while the court was deciding ownership and liability. Po-



Why All The Anger?

BY ROBERT B. REICH

Tribune Content Agency

Why is the nation more bitterly divided today than it's been in 80 years? Why is there more anger, vituperation and political polarization now than even during Joe McCarthy's anti-communist witch hunts of the 1950s, the tempestuous struggle for civil rights in the 1960s, the divisive Vietnam War, or the Watergate scandal?

If anything, you'd think this would be an era of relative calm. The Soviet Union has disappeared and the Cold War is over. The civil rights struggle continues, but at least we now have a black middle class and even a black president. While the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been controversial, the all-volunteer army means young Americans aren't being dragged off to war against their will. And although politicians continue to generate scandals, the transgressions don't threaten the integrity of our government as did Watergate.

And yet, by almost every measure, Americans are angrier today. They're more contemptuous of almost every major institution — government, business, the media. They're more convinced the nation is on the wrong track. And they are far more polarized.

Political scientists say the gap between the median Republican voter and the median Democrat is wider today on a whole host of issues than it's been since the 1920s.

Undoubtedly, social media play a part — allowing people to pop off without bearing much responsibility for what they say. And most of us can cocoon within virtual or real communities whose members confirm all our biases and assumptions.

Meanwhile, cable news and yell radio compete for viewers and listeners by being ever more strident. Not long ago I debated a Republican economic advisor on a cable TV program. During the brief station break, the show's producer told me to "be angrier." I told her I didn't want to be angrier. "You have to," she said. "Viewers are surfing through hundreds of channels and will stop for a gladiator contest."

Within this cacophony, we've lost trusted arbiters of truth — the Edward Murrows and Walter Cronkites who could explain what was happening in ways most Americans found convincing.

We've also lost most living memory of an era in which we were all in it together — the Great Depression and World War II — and when we succeeded or failed together. In those years we were palpably dependent on one another, and understood how much we owed each other as members of the same society.

Leonard Pitts Jr.

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.

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It's been a war on justice, an assault on equal protection under the law.

And a war on families, removing millions of fathers from millions of homes.

And a war on money, spilling it like water.

And a war on people of color, targeting them with drone strike efficiency.

We never call it any of those things, though all of them fit. No, we call it the War on Drugs. It is a 42-year, trillion-dollar disaster that has done nothing — underscore that: absolutely nothing — to stem the inexhaustible supply of, and insatiable demand for, illegal narcotics. In the process, it has rendered this "land of the free" the biggest jailer on Earth.

So any reason to hope sanity might assert itself is cause for celebration. Monday, we got two of them, a coincidental confluence of headlines that left me wondering, albeit, fleetingly: Did the War on Drugs just end?

Well, no. Let's not get carried away. But it is fair to say two of the biggest guns just went silent.

• Gun 1: In a speech before an American Bar Association conference in San Francisco, Attorney General Eric Holder announced that federal prosecutors will no longer charge nonviolent, low-level drug offenders with offenses that fall under mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines. Those Kafkaesque rules, you may recall, got Kemba Smith, a college student with no criminal record, sentenced to almost 25 years without parole after she carried money for her abusive, drug-dealing boyfriend.

• Gun 2: A federal judge ruled New York City's stop-and-frisk policy unconstitutional. The tactic, more in line with some communist backwater than with a nation that explicitly guarantees freedom from random search and seizure, empowered cops to search anyone they deemed suspicious, no probable cause necessary. Unsurprisingly, 84 percent of those stopped were black or Hispanic, according to the Center for Constitutional Rights, a civil rights group, which says illegal drugs or weapons were

But I think the deeper explanation for what has happened has economic roots. From the end of World War II through the late 1970s, the economy doubled in size — as did almost everyone's income. Almost all Americans grew together. In fact, those in the bottom fifth of the income ladder saw their incomes more than double. Americans experienced upward mobility on a grand scale.

Yet for the last 3 1/2 decades, the middle class has been losing ground. The median wage of male workers is now lower than it was in 1980, adjusted for inflation.

In addition, all the mechanisms we've used over the last three decades to minimize the effects of this descent — young mothers streaming into paid work in the late 1970s and 1980s, everyone working longer hours in the 1990s, and then borrowing against the rising values of our homes — are now exhausted. And wages are still dropping — the median wage is now 4 percent below what it was at the start of the so-called recovery.

Meanwhile, income, wealth and power have become more concentrated at the top than they've been in 90 years.

As a result, many have come to believe that the deck is stacked against them. Importantly, both the Tea Party and the Occupier movements began with the bailouts of Wall Street — when both groups concluded that big government and big finance had plotted against the rest of us. The former blamed government; the latter blamed Wall Street.

Political scientists have also discovered a high correlation between inequality and political divisiveness.

The last time America was this bitterly divided was in the 1920s, which was the last time income, wealth and power were this concentrated.

When average people feel the game is rigged, they get angry. And that anger can easily find its way into deep resentments — of the poor, of blacks, of immigrants, of unions, of the well-educated, of government.

This shouldn't be surprising. Demagogues throughout history have used anger to target scapegoats — thereby dividing and conquering, and distracting people from the real sources of their frustrations.

Make no mistake: The savage inequality America is experiencing today is deeply dangerous.

Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of "Beyond Outrage," now available in paperback. His new film, "Inequality for All," will be out September 27. He blogs at www.robertreich.org.

An End To The War On Drugs

found in less than 2 percent of the searches.

Michelle Alexander wrote the book on the drug war — literally. "The New Jim Crow" documents in painful, painstaking detail how policies like these have been directed disproportionately against communities of color with devastating effect.

She told me via email that Monday's headlines leave her "cautiously optimistic" they reflect an emerging national consensus that "war on certain communities defined by race and class has proved to be both immoral and irrational, wasting billions of dollars and countless lives."

But, she warned, "tinkering with the incarceration machine" is not enough. These are important first steps, but only that. She'd like to see the resources that have been wasted in this "war" redirected to help the communities it decimated.

"We've spent more than a trillion dollars destroying those communities in the War on Drugs; we can spend at least that much helping them to recover. We must build a movement for education, not incarceration; jobs, not jails. We must do justice by repairing the harm that has been done. In that process, perhaps we will finally reverse the psychology that brought us to this point and learn to care about poor people of all colors, rather than simply viewing them as the problem."

We can only hope. At the very least, Monday's headlines suggest maybe a sea change is under way. Maybe we're ready to stop using criminal justice tools to solve a public health problem. Maybe we're ready to end this "War."

It's about time. Indeed, it is past time. Our stubborn insistence on these foolish, unworkable policies has left families bereft, communities devastated, cops and bystanders dead, money wasted, foreign governments destabilized, distrust legitimized and justice betrayed.

We call it the War on Drugs. Truth is, drugs are about the only thing it hasn't hurt.

Leonard Pitts is a columnist for The Miami Herald, 1 Herald Plaza, Miami, Fla., 33132. Readers may contact him via e-mail at lpitts@miamiherald.com.

lice department personnel were the only ones allowed to feed, water and clean Capone's kennel. He continued to exhibit aggressive behavior to all official personnel.

In June, during a public hearing, Capone became a "ward of the state." The city's attorney and animal control were the only people present. Time was running out. Relocation plans fell through. Then success came from a collaboration between the police chief and Heartland Humane Society.

Capone's story is a happy TALE.

We are fortunate to have a decent, kind and caring animal control officer working for Yankton, these past 13.5 years. Let's work together helping our animal population.