

## THE PRESS &amp; DAKOTAN

THE DAKOTAS' OLDEST NEWSPAPER | FOUNDED 1861

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## OPINION | OUR VIEW

Political Priorities  
Missing The Point

What's wrong with this picture? First, we look to the world of politics. We are barely nine months removed from the last presidential election and there are already myriad storylines forming for the 2016 election. What will Hillary Clinton do? Is Texas Sen. Ted Cruz going to run? How about former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush? What was Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul doing in Iowa recently? What is Vice President Joe Biden doing in New Hampshire? It has the political wonks abuzz and the political parties marshaling resources for that next epic battle.

Now, let's look at what politicians who run for office are actually doing these days while they're in office. For starters, Congress is on vacation for the entire month of August — even though sequestration is still gnawing away at services across the board (the latest target, according to The Associated Press, is Head Start) with no end in sight. Meanwhile, we're hearing more saber rattling about shutting down government this fall, this time over Obamacare. We still don't have a farm bill. We have a tepid economic recovery, crumbling infrastructure and tangled immigration issues, to name just a few pressing concerns that Americans face.

There is so much to do and so much that needs to be done — and yet, there seems to be more political energy and urgency aimed at 2016 than at what's on the to-do list right now.

And it won't get any better once Congress returns from its current recess. The U.S. House is scheduled to work only nine days in September, even though the current fiscal year ends on Sept. 30 and there are still many fiscal appropriation bills hanging in the ether. (Of course, that work schedule looks positively feverish compared to last January, when the House worked just seven days.) During the final three months of the year, the House is scheduled to be in session all of 26 days, compared to the Senate's 57 days. (At this point, you can draw whatever conclusions you wish from the differences between the Republican-led House and the Democratic Senate.)

There's a maddening disconnect between what needs to be done and what some politicians are actually doing about it.

So, here's some advice the political architects in both parties who are busily positioning resources for 2016 (as well as for the 2014 mid-terms) while letting more pressing business slide:

Do your jobs.

And by that, remember that your jobs are to serve the American people, to address their needs, their wants, their fears and their pains. That's what you're elected to do.

Running for office is not the point of all this. But that seems to have gotten lost, blurred amid the excessive money machines that drive the political industry — and it has become an industry, swimming in money, but at the cost of lost perspective.

When you lose perspective in politics, you sacrifice the people's respect.

Americans deserve better than what they're getting from Washington. Instead of jockeying for presidential stature in 2016, maybe our lawmakers should worry about having a job at all the next time their names come on the ballot. They really aren't justifying their pay now.

kmh

## SPEAK UP!

■ Share your thoughts with us. Write to the **PRESS & DAKOTAN** on a topic of the day or in response to an editorial or story. Write us at: Letters, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078, drop off at 319 Walnut in Yankton, fax to 665-1721 or email to [views@yankton.net](mailto:views@yankton.net).

## ON THIS DATE

## By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, Aug. 21, the 233th day of 2013. There are 132 days left in the year.

**Today's Highlight in History:** On August 21, 1883, Philippine opposition leader Benigno S. Aquino Jr., ending a self-imposed exile in the United States, was shot dead moments after stepping off a plane at Manila International Airport.

**On this date:** In 1831, Nat Turner led a violent slave rebellion in Virginia resulting in the deaths of at least 55 white people. He was later executed.

In 1858, the first of seven debates between Illinois senatorial contenders Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas took place.

In 1863, pro-Confederate raiders attacked Lawrence, Kan., massacring the men and destroying the town's buildings.

In 1911, Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" was stolen from the Louvre Museum in Paris. The painting was recovered two years later in Italy.

In 1912, the Boy Scouts of America named its first Eagle Scout, Arthur Rose Eldred of Troop 1 in Rockville Centre, N.Y.

In 1940, exiled Communist revolutionary Leon Trotsky died in a Mexican hospital from wounds inflicted by an assassin the day before.

In 1959, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed an executive order making Hawaii the 50th state.

In 1963, martial law was declared in South Vietnam as police and army troops began a violent crackdown on Buddhist anti-government protesters.

In 1972, the Republican National Convention opened in Miami Beach.

In 1983, the musical play "La Cage Aux Folles" opened on Broadway.

In 1991, the hard-line coup against Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev collapsed in the face of a popular uprising led by Russian Federation President Boris N. Yeltsin.

In 1993, in a serious setback for NASA, engineers lost contact with the Mars Observer spacecraft as it was about to reach the red planet on a \$980 million mission.

**Ten years ago:** Alabama's top judge, Chief Justice Roy Moore, refused to back down in his fight to keep a Ten Commandments monument and lashed out at his colleagues who'd ordered it removed from the rotunda of the state judicial building. Palestinian militants abandoned a 2-month-old truce after Israel killed a Hamas leader in a missile attack. The French government acknowledged that as many as 10,000 people might have died in the country's heat wave. Paul Hamm (nahm) put together a near-perfect routine on the high bar to become the first American man to win the all-around gold medal at the World Gymnastics Championship.

**Five years ago:** President George W. Bush issued a federal disaster declaration for parts of Florida affected by Tropical Storm Fay. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived in Baghdad for discussions with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and other top Iraqi officials. Twin Taliban suicide bombings at Pakistan's largest weapons complex killed at least 67 people. At the Summer Olympics, Japan defeated the U.S. softball team, 3-1, to win the gold medal. Kerri Walsh and Misty May-Treanor won their second consecutive gold medal in beach volleyball, beating Wang Jie and Tian Jia of China. The U.S. women's soccer team won the gold medal by beating Brazil 1-0 in extra time. One-time actor Fred Crane, who'd played one of the Tarleton twins in "Gone With the Wind," died in Atlanta at age 90.

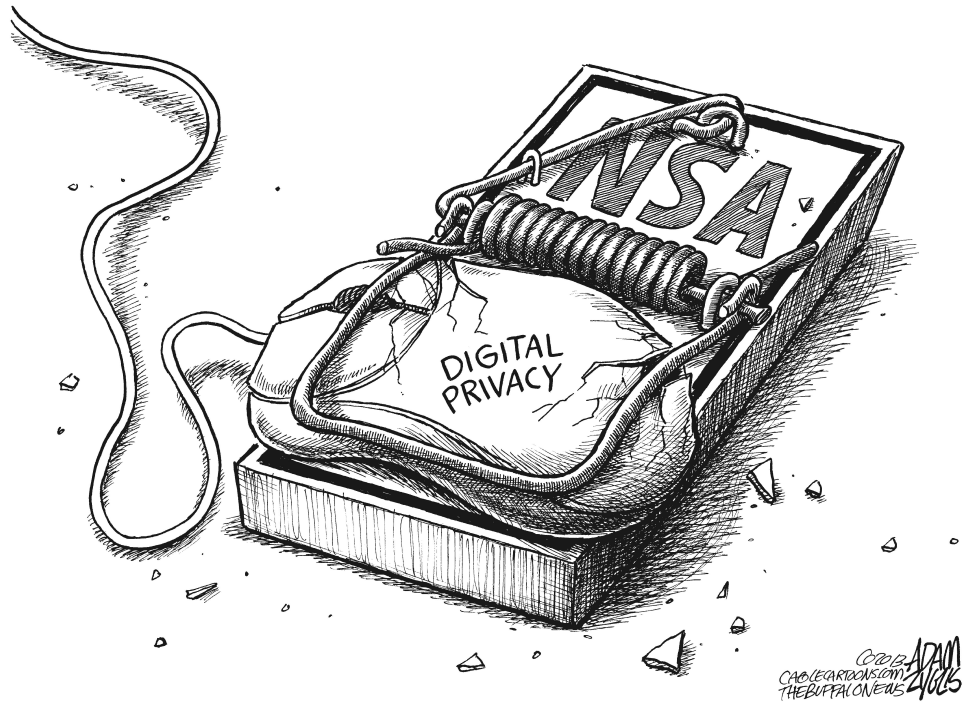
**One year ago:** An insurgent rocket attack damaged the plane of the top U.S. general as it sat parked at a coalition base in Afghanistan; U.S. Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was unhurt. Missouri Rep. Todd Akin defied the nation's top Republicans and refused to abandon a Senate bid hobbled by fallout over his comments that women's bodies could prevent pregnancies in cases of "legitimate rape." (Akin went on to lose the fall election.)

**Today's Birthdays:** Former football player Pete Retzlaff is 82. Actor-director Melvin Van Peebles is 81. Playwright Mart Crowley is 78. Singer Kenny Rogers is 75. Actor Clarence Williams III is 74. Rock-and-roll musician James Burton is 74. Singer Harold Reid (The Statler Brothers) is 74. Singer Jackie DeShannon is 72. College and Pro Football Hall of Famer Willie Lanier is 68. Actress Patty McCormack is 68. Pop singer-musician Carl Giammarese is 66. Actress Loretta Devine is 64. NBC newsmen Harry Smith is 62. Singer Glenn Hughes is 61. Country musician Nick Kane is 59. Actress Kim Cattrall is 57. College Football Hall of Famer and former NFL quarterback Jim McMahon is 54. Actress Cleo King is 51. MLB All-Star pitcher John Wetteland is 47. Rock singer Serj Tankian (System of a Down) is 46. Actress Carrie-Anne Moss is 43. MLB player Craig Counsell is 43. Rock musician Liam Howlett (Prodigy) is 42. Actress Alicia Witt is 38. Singer Kelis is 34. TV personality Brody Jenner is 30. Singer Melissa Schuman is 29. Olympic gold medal sprinter Usain Bolt is 27. Actor Cody Kasch is 26. Country singer Kacey Musgraves is 25. Actress Hayden Panettiere is 24. Actor RJ Mitte is 21.

**Thought for Today:** "To know a little less and to understand a little more: that, it seems to me, is our greatest need." — James Ramsey Ullman, American author (1907-1971).

## FROM THE BIBLE

Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis



## What Of The Public Good?

BY ROBERT B. REICH

Tribune Content Agency

Congress is in recess, but you'd hardly know it. This has been the most do-nothing, gridlocked Congress in decades. But the recess at least offers a pause in the ongoing partisan fighting that's sure to resume in a few weeks.

It also offers an opportunity to step back and ask ourselves what's really at stake.

A society — any society — is defined as a set of mutual benefits and duties embodied most visibly in public institutions: public schools, public libraries, public transportation, public hospitals, public parks, public museums, public recreation, public universities, and so on.

Public institutions are supported by all taxpayers, and are available to all. If the tax system is progressive, those who are better off (and who, presumably, have benefitted from many of these same public institutions) help pay for everyone else.

"Privatize" means "Pay for it yourself." The practical consequence of this in an economy whose wealth and income are now more concentrated than at any time in the past 90 years is to make high-quality public goods available to fewer and fewer.

In fact, much of what's called "public" is increasingly a private good paid for by users — ever-higher tolls on public highways and public bridges, higher tuitions at so-called public universities, higher admission fees at public parks and public museums.

Much of the rest of what's considered "public" has become so shoddy that those who can afford to do so find private alternatives. As public schools deteriorate, the upper-middle class and wealthy send their kids to private ones. As public pools and playgrounds decay, the better-off buy memberships in private tennis and swimming clubs. As public hospitals decline, the well-off pay premium rates for private care.

Gated communities and office parks now come with their own manicured lawns and walkways, security guards and backup power systems.

Why the decline of public institutions? The financial squeeze on government at all levels since 2008 explains only part of it.

The slide really started more than three decades ago with so-called "tax revolts" by a middle class whose earnings had stopped advancing even though the economy continued to grow. Most families still wanted good public services and institutions but could no longer afford the tab.

Since the late 1970s, almost all the gains from growth have gone to the top. But as the upper-middle class and the rich began shifting to private institutions, they withdrew political support for public ones.

In consequence, their marginal tax rates dropped — setting off a vicious cycle of diminishing revenues and deteriorating quality, spurring more flight from public institutions.

Tax revenues from corporations also dropped as big companies went global — keeping their profits overseas and their tax bills to a minimum.

But that's not the whole story. America no longer values public goods as we did decades ago.

The great expansion of public institutions in America began in the early years of 20th century, when progressive reformers championed the idea that we all benefit from public goods. Excellent schools, roads, parks, play-

grounds and transit systems would knit the new industrial society together, create better citizens and generate widespread prosperity.

Education, for example, was less a personal investment than a public good — improving the entire community and ultimately the nation.

In subsequent decades — through the Great Depression, World War II and the Cold War — this logic was expanded upon. Strong public institutions were seen as bulwarks against, in turn, mass poverty, fascism and then communism.

The public good was palpable: We were very much a society bound together by mutual needs and common threats. It was no coincidence that the greatest extensions of higher education after World War II were the GI Bill and the National Defense Education Act, or that the largest public works project in history was called the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act.

But in a post-Cold War America distorted by global capital, distorted by concentrated income and wealth, undermined by unlimited campaign donations, and rocked by a wave of new immigrants easily cast by demagogues as "them," the notion of the public good has faded.

Not even Democrats still use the phrase "the public good." Public goods are now, at best, "public investments." Public institutions have morphed into "public-private partnerships" or, for Republicans, simply "vouchers."

Medicare is growing faster than the GDP only because the costs of health care are growing faster than the economy. That means any attempt to turn Medicare into a voucher — without either raising the voucher in tandem with those costs or somehow taming them — will just reduce the elderly's access to health care.

Other safety nets are in tatters. Unemployment insurance reaches just 40 percent of the jobless these days (largely because eligibility requires having had a steady full-time job for a number of years rather than, as with most people, a string of jobs or part-time work).

Outside of defense, domestic discretionary spending is down sharply as a percent of the economy. Add in declines in state and local spending, and total public spending on education, infrastructure and basic research has dropped dramatically over the past five years as a portion of GDP.

America has, though, created a whopping entitlement for the biggest Wall Street banks and their top executives — who, unlike most of the rest of us, are no longer allowed to fail. They can also borrow from the Fed at almost no cost, then lend out the money at 3 percent to 6 percent.

All told, Wall Street's entitlement is the biggest offered by the federal government, even though it doesn't show up in the budget. And it's not even a public good. It's just private gain.

We're losing public goods available to all, supported by the tax payments of all and especially the better-off. In its place we have private goods available to the very rich, supported by the rest of us.

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](http://www.robertreich.org).

## YOUR LETTERS

## More Names

## Donna Bodden, Tabor

I am writing this in response to the article published in the *Press & Dakotan* on Friday, July 19, involving the arrest of Richard Allen Schaefer of Yankton after being indicted in federal court in a methamphetamine case.

U.S. Attorney Brendan V. Johnson's press release stated Richard Allen Schaefer, 42, has been indicted by a federal grand jury for his participation in a methamphetamine distribution conspiracy.

My overall question pertaining to this matter is why the other four individuals that were also part of this methamphetamine distribution conspiracy were never publicly stated. If the article was published so the citizens of Yankton were made aware of the drug activity that was taking place and to inform them of the importance of this arrest in trying to stop the drug activity in Yankton, why were the other arrests not so important and needing to be known? It wouldn't be because of their last names, would it? If so, it sounds a little prejudiced to me!

Just to be clear for anyone reading this let-

ter: I am not defending or making accusations towards anyone. I just think if it was important to be made aware of one of the individuals who were arrested, we should also have been made aware of the other four participating individuals and their arrests, considering a couple of them also lived in Yankton.

## By The Numbers

## Rex Alberts, Yankton

U.S. statistical data on unnatural deaths is rounded and does vary each year. Medical errors are also a large unlisted area. The life expectancy in the United States is now at 38th in the world according to the United Nations.

All listings below are per year in the U.S.:

- Abortion deaths — 1,000,000
- Prescription deaths — 100,000
- Traffic deaths — 32,000
- Gun deaths — 11,500

The number living with injuries is usually large — except abortions. Two million have drug reactions.

(Source of some of this data is "Public Citizen.")

## WRITE US

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