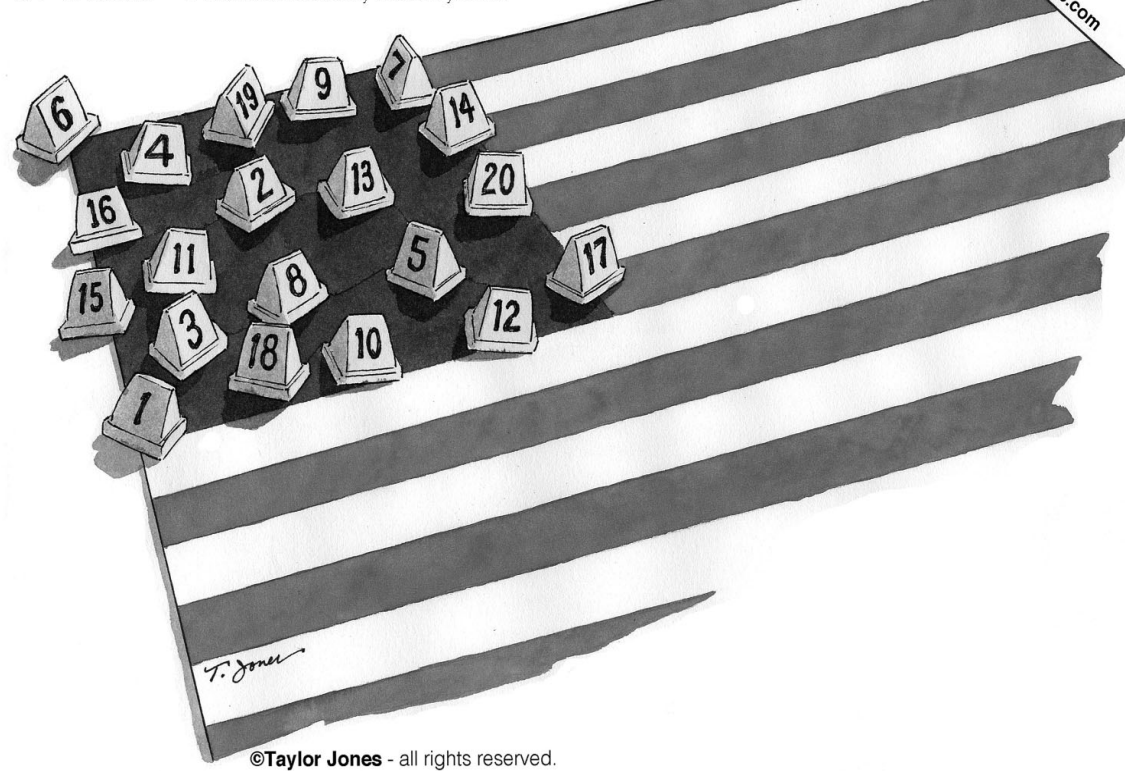


"They had their entire lives ahead of them." - President Obama, Dec. 14, 2012.



What Happens in Vegas

BY BILL O'REILLY
Creators Syndicate

LAS VEGAS — This is a town that looks better at night. Millions of lights pierce the darkness creating a visual that is both energetic and trance-inducing. The multilayered lightshow is dazzling and unique in America.

But when the sun comes up, Las Vegas speaks directly to the recession. Half-completed buildings loom over the landscape like giant steel skeletons. Some developers ran out of money and simply walked away leaving huge, hulking abandoned structures to absorb the desert wind.

But just down Las Vegas Blvd. are the winners: lavish hotels that cater to one's every need. This is a city that best defines the two Americas and our very competitive capitalistic system. If you want to understand the free marketplace, Las Vegas is an excellent classroom.

Millions of hardworking folks come here to have fun. In order to maximize the entertainment, you have to spend money. Whether you spend it on gambling, live shows or fine dining, it's up to you. The money flow supports tens of thousands of service workers and, at a much higher level, the movers who run the tourist businesses. If you can't make a decent living in Vegas, you are in major trouble. Responsible workers are sorely needed.

But still there is destitution on display. Addiction is the primary driver of that, although laziness is featured, as well. Some of the poor in this town simply want to play all the time. And they pay a price for that, as prosperity eludes them.

Some of the have-nots sit on sidewalks hoping for money from passersby. Sometimes, gamblers give the

beggers casino chips. Panhandlers say the best time for them is after midnight when the winners emerge from the gambling dens. Redistribution is much easier when you've just run the table.

President Obama should spend some time in Vegas. Maybe then he would understand capitalism better. No matter how many handouts the panhandlers get, their circumstances rarely change. The money is mostly used to feed their compulsions.

On the other end, the rich 1 percenters hustling the gambling tables are trying to increase their affluence by taking chances. In the process, they are providing salaries for the hardworking men and women who keep the entertainment establishments running. Bottom line: Both the wealthy and the poor in Vegas are exercising their personal freedoms.

From observing the action in Vegas, Obama might finally realize that it's freedom of choice that most often dictates who fails and who succeeds in the capitalistic system. In Vegas, no outcomes are guaranteed and no government can level the playing field. Prosperity or lack thereof is all about individual decision-making.

But the president would most likely never admit that, because it goes against his belief that government can impose a form of social justice by forcibly redistributing the wages of the successful.

For Barack Obama, what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.

Veteran TV news anchor Bill O'Reilly is host of the Fox News show "The O'Reilly Factor" and author of the book "Pinheads and Patriots: Where You Stand in the Age of Obama."



Bill
O'REILLY

Un-Hitching The Middle Class

BY KATHLEEN PARKER
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WASHINGTON — As politicians compete to prove who loves the middle class more, they're missing the elephant and the donkey in the room.

The middle class needs not just tax breaks and jobs but also marriage.

This is the finding of a new University of Virginia and Institute for American Values report, "The State of Our Unions," which tracks the decline of marriage among the nearly 60 percent of Americans who have high school but not college educations. This not only has far-reaching societal repercussions but economic as well. By one estimate cited in the report, which was authored by five family scholars, the cost to taxpayers when stable families fail to form is about \$112 billion annually — or more than \$1 trillion per decade.

Obviously, marriage or the lack thereof isn't the only cause of our deficit spending, but nor is it irrelevant. Consider that in the 1980s, only 13 percent of children were born outside of marriage among moderately educated mothers. By the end of this century's first decade, the number had risen to 44 percent. That we seem unfazed by these numbers suggests a lack of attention to the reasons why marriage matters in the first place. It isn't so that wedding planners can bilk day-dreamers out of \$50 billion a year or so that bridezillas can have reality shows. Marriage matters because children do best when raised in a stable environment with two committed parents, exceptions notwithstanding.

For whatever reasons — a fear of appearing judgmental or hypocritical, perhaps — no one makes a peep. Many of us, after all, have divorced. But this fact doesn't mean marriage is no longer important or that children's needs have changed. Furthermore, this report isn't concerned with the well-educated who are typically better equipped to cope with dysfunction, financial or otherwise.

What happens to the other 60 percent? And what happens to a society upon whose beneficence the offspring of these broken or never-formed families ultimately may depend? Why isn't anyone talking about this?

In the past, dramatic family changes have prompted calls to national action. The Moynihan Report of 1965 focused attention on the alarming rise of African-American children born out of wedlock. In the 1990s, rising divorce rates and single motherhood spawned a fatherhood movement and welfare reform.

Recently, same-sex marriage has dominated our interests.

The hollowing out of marriage in middle America cries out for similarly impassioned action. As lead author Elizabeth Marquardt told me in an email:

"Marriage is not merely a private arrangement; it is also a complex social institution. Marriage fosters small cooperative unions — also known as stable families — that enable children to thrive, shore up communities, and help family members to succeed during good times and to weather the bad times. Researchers are finding that the disappearance of marriage in Middle America is tracking with the disappearance of the middle class in the same communities, a change that strikes at the very heart of the American Dream."

Our current debate about the fiscal cliff and entitlement spending can't be separated from the breakdown of marriage. In the absence of stable families, economic/societal need increases. And while most good-hearted souls wish to help those in distress, we are essentially plugging holes in leaky boats. Shouldn't we build better boats?

The report's scholars suggest doing this with a series of federal and state proposals. One is to change the tax and welfare system, which frequently imposes financial penalties — up to 20 percent of family income — on low-income couples who choose to marry.

Another suggestion is to triple the child tax credit for children under 3, which would have the added benefit of encouraging married people to have more children — much needed in the longer-term to support the nation's elderly.

These are but two of many, which can be viewed online at stateofourunions.org, along with an urgent plea that President Obama include some of these thoughts in his own State of the Union next month. It insults no one to encourage couples to marry before having children, thus making a public as well as private commitment to love and care for them.

Perhaps most important, to ignore the marriage deficit among America's middle class is essentially to be complicit in perpetuating a society of winners and losers. Those born to married, well-educated parents are more likely to prosper, while those born to fragmented families are more likely to repeat the patterns of their parents.

Therein is a national tragedy worthy of our attention.

Kathleen Parker's email address is kathleen-parker@washpost.com.



Kathleen
PARKER

YOUR LETTERS

A 'Stunning' Decision

Dr. Lars Aanning, Yankton

The governor refuses to accept Obamacare's expansion of Medicaid. That leaves more than 68,000 South Dakotans with no health insurance.

Does the governor and his aides really understand

what it is like to have no access to healthcare except for emergencies? Do "free" clinics really offer all the care that the governor and his aides enjoy when they visit their physicians?

This governor's rejection of federal aid to expand coverage of the uninsured is simply stunning.

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Rural America Must Make Itself Heard

THE DAILY REPUBLIC, Mitchell (Dec. 12): A story in a recent edition of *The Daily Republic* has struck a nerve with us. The report noted how U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said that rural America is "becoming less and less relevant."

He linked that comment with Congress' failure to pass a farm bill, noting that "rural America with a shrinking population is becoming less and less relevant to the politics of this country." He said those of us who live in rural America better "recognize that and we better begin to reverse it."

Then, just a day later, The Associated Press reported that a pipeline is being proposed to carry Missouri River water to parched areas of the country, hundreds of miles from the basin.

These two stories weren't meant to be linked, but they have clear connections. Shortly after Vilsack says urbanites are taking us for granted, we hear that some of those urbanites now covet one of our most important natural resources.

The latter report told how the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming have been considering ways to get more water into the West.

Perhaps we're getting too territorial here, but those sound like fighting words. They also come just months after a federal government proposal to start charging cities and other users who pull water straight from the banks of the Missouri River.

Delaying the farm bill is bad enough. That our Congress cannot see fit to push through laws that will have great effect on how we do business out here on the prairie is frustrating indeed.

Add to that this most recent news that other states covet Missouri River water and the federal government wants to charge us for the water that flows through our state, and it sure feels like Vilsack is dead-on correct. Rural America is emptying out and losing relevance, and outsiders increasingly view our part of the country only as a place to exploit. (Even the author of the story about the potential Missouri River water pipeline, writing from St. Louis, unwittingly showed how irrelevant we've become by erroneously stating that the Missouri River starts in North Dakota. That's reflective of an attitude that basically says "whatever — it's somewhere out there in that wasteland, and one place is the same as the next.")

It's all very depressing to consider, but another recent story provides some hope. Recently, it was reported that the Army Corps of Engineers rejected calls from more-populated states to dump greater flows of Missouri River water into the Mississippi River to aid barge traffic. That decision by the corps was preceded by a lot of lobbying on all sides, including some very strong and even angry rhetoric from elected officials in South Dakota and the rest of the upper Missouri River basin. It wasn't that lobbying alone that protected the interests of the upper basin, but it certainly appeared to help. And it didn't hurt that the corps was still smarting over the public embarrassment heaped on it by upper Missouri River basin interests after the disastrous flooding of 2011.

The lesson from all of this is clear: If rural America wants to remain relevant, it must put forth strong leaders and stand up for itself. Our congressional delegates and other officials must be firm, and they must band together with other rural-state leaders to be heard.

It's already a frustrating time in rural America. The drought is making everyone edgy.

The last thing we need is further delay on the farm bill, or discussions about diverting Missouri River water far away from us, or federal fees on water that flows through our state.

SPEAK OUT!

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.

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Monday, Dec. 17, the 352nd day of 2012. There are 14 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Dec. 17, 1992, President George H.W. Bush, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari signed the North American Free Trade Agreement in separate ceremonies. (After approval by the legislative bodies of the leaders' respective countries, the treaty came into force on Jan. 1, 1994.)

On this date: In 1777, France recognized American independence. In 1830, South American patriot Simon Bolivar died in Colombia.

In 1865, Franz Schubert's Symphony No. 8, the "Unfinished" (because only two of its movements were completed) was performed publicly for the first time in Vienna, 37 years after the composer's death.

In 1903, Wilbur and Orville Wright of Dayton, Ohio, conducted the first successful manned powered-airplane flights near Kitty Hawk, N.C., using their experimental craft, the Wright Flyer.

In 1925, Col. William "Billy" Mitchell was convicted at his court-martial in Washington of insubordination for accusing senior military officials of incompetence and criminal negligence; he was suspended from active duty.

In 1939, the German pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee* was scuttled by its crew, ending the World War II Battle of the River Plate off Uruguay.

In 1944, the U.S. Army announced it was ending its policy of excluding Japanese-Americans from the West Coast.

In 1957, the United States successfully test-fired the Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile for the first time.

In 1961, an arson fire at a circus in Niteroi, Brazil, killed 323 people.

In 1975, Lynette Fromme was sentenced in Sacramento, Calif., to life in prison for her attempt on the life of President Gerald R. Ford. (She was paroled in Aug. 2009.)

In 1979, in a case that aggravated racial tensions, Arthur McDuffie, a black insurance executive, was fatally injured after leading police on a chase with his motor-cycle in Miami. (Four white police officers accused of beating McDuffie were later acquitted, sparking riots.)

In 1981, members of the Red Brigades kidnapped Brig. Gen. James L. Dozier, the highest-ranking U.S. Army official in southern Europe, from his home in Verona, Italy. (Dozier was rescued 42 days later.)

Ten years ago: Insurance and finance company Conseqco Inc. filed for Chapter 11 (Conseqco emerged from bankruptcy protection the following year). The government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, rebels and opposition parties signed a

peace agreement to end four years of civil war. Playwright Frederick Knott, who wrote "Dial M For Murder" and "Wait Until Dark," died in New York City at age 86.

Five years ago: President George W. Bush, addressing a Rotary Club meeting, tried to reassure an edgy public that the economy was "pretty good" despite the mix of a falling housing market, a national credit crunch and surging energy costs. Iran received its first nuclear fuel from Russia, paving the way for the startup of its reactor. Gov. Jon S. Corzine signed a measure making New Jersey the first state to abolish the death penalty in more than 40 years. NBC announced that Jay Leno and Conan O'Brien were planning to return to their late-night shows in early 2008, even as the writers' strike continued.

One year ago: North Korean leader Kim Jong Il died after more than a decade of iron rule; he was 69, according to official records, but some reports indicated he was 70. Advocates for immigrants gathered outside Alabama's state Capitol in Montgomery to call for repeal of a controversial law they said harkened back to the state's segregationist past.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Armin Mueller-Stahl is 82. Singer-actor Tommy Steele is 76. Rock singer-musician Art Neville is 75. Actor Bernard Hill is 68. Actor Ernie Hudson is 67. Political commentator Chris Matthews is 67. Comedian-actor Eugene Levy is 66. Actress Marilyn Hassett is 65. Actor Wes Studi is 65. Pop musician Jim Bonfanti (The Raspberries) is 64. Actor Joel Brooks is 63. Rock singer Paul Rodgers is 63. Rhythm-and-blues singer Wanda Hutchinson (The Emotions) is 61. Actor Bill Pullman is 59. Actor Barry Livingston is 59. Country singer Sharon White is 59. Producer-director-writer Peter Farrelly is 56. Rock musician Mike Mills (R.E.M.) is 54. Pop singer Sarah Dallin (Bananarama) is 51. Country musician Tim Cheurning is 50. Country singer Tracy Byrd is 46. Country musician Duane Propes is 46. Actress Laurie Holden is 43. DJ Homicide (Sugar Ray) is 42. Actor Sean Patrick Thomas is 42. Actress Claire Forlani is 41. Pop-rock musician Eddie Fisher (OneRepublic) is 39. Actress Sarah Paulson is 38. Actress Marissa Ribisi is 38. Actor Giovanni Ribisi is 38. Actress Milla Jovovich is 37. Singer Bree Sharp is 37. Actress Jennifer Carpenter is 33. Singer-songwriter Ben Goldwasser (MGMT) is 30. Actress Shannon Woodward is 28. Actress Emma Bell is 26. Actress Vanessa Zima is 26. Actor-singer Nat Wolff is 18.

Thought for Today: "Democracy is not an easy form of government, because it is never final: it is a living, changing organism, with a continuous shifting and adjusting of balance between individual freedom and general order." — Ilka Chase, American author, actress, humorist (1905-1978).

FROM THE BIBLE

Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed. 2 Timothy 3:14. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

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