



# ‘Yes, Virginia, There Is A Santa Claus’

As has been our tradition for the past several Christmas eves, we are reprinting today perhaps the most famous letter ever written to an editor in the history of journalism.

The letter was written by Virginia O’Hanlon in 1897 and asked a timeless question: “Is there a Santa Claus.” The response, written by *New York Sun* editor Francis P. Church, has become a piece of our Christmas tradition and offers one of the most memorable replies ever put to paper, regardless of the season.

It remains a special light in these early days of winter — a beacon in the darkness, much like Christmas itself.

In this particularly dark holiday season — with the aching facts of a school massacre in Connecticut still fresh in our heads — it also offers a plea to resist the grim spirits of a “skeptical age” and pursue instead a magic that will “make glad the heart of childhood.” On this Christmas Eve, we hope and pray for such solace amid the tears.

Dear Editor:  
I am 8 years old.  
Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus.  
Papa says, “If you see it in the Sun it’s so.”  
Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?  
Virginia O’Hanlon  
15 West 95th St.

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except what they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men’s or children’s, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! How dreary



would be the world if there were no Virginias. There would be no child-like faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We would have no enjoyment, except in the sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus? You might as well not believe in fairies. You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but

that’s no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive nor imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby’s rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest men, not even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance can push aside the curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. It is all true. Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding!

No Santa Claus! Thank God he lives and lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay 10 times 10 thousand years to come, he will come to make glad the heart of childhood.

# The Christmas Spirit Fights On

BY BILL O'REILLY  
Creators Syndicate

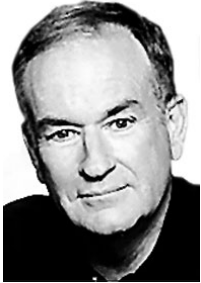
Anyone offended by public displays of Christmas needs to see a psychiatrist. Are we clear on this? You are a loon if the sight of baby Jesus arouses anger or sadness in you. Get help.

This brings us to the governor of Rhode Island, Lincoln Chafee. He recently told me on national television that the reason he will not use the word “Christmas” in describing the state Christmas tree is that the word might offend non-Christians. The governor calls the state-purchased symbol a “holiday tree.”

My reply to the governor was that by excluding the word “Christmas,” he might be offending the 73 percent of Americans who describe themselves as Christian, not to mention the 2.2 billion Christians worldwide. Chafee chafed when he heard that but had no answer.

And then the governor did a very interesting thing: He announced the lighting of the “holiday tree” in Providence a full 30 minutes before the cord was plugged in. Very few Rhode Islanders even knew about the tree lighting because it was done so surreptitiously. Chafee did that because he feared protestors would do what they did last year: sing Christmas carols at the lighting. And we can’t have that, now, can we?

Jon Stewart and his merry band of elves will tell you that the so-called “War on Christmas” is a figment of the imagination, perhaps a result of indigestion after eating too much holiday pudding. Stewart’s posture is similar to what Ebenezer Scrooge put forth when the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come told him he was bound for hell. I am channeling Charles Dickens to see whether the ghost can visit Stewart on Christmas Eve. I’ll let you know what happens.



Bill O'REILLY

There is something to the argument that there are more important things to worry about than whether people like Christmas. But the assaults against the national holiday are annoying, unnecessary and often disrespectful. I mean, here’s how bad it is in this country: A pastor in Arkansas canceled a play called “Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown” because some nutty atheist objected to public school kids seeing it on church grounds. So Charlie, Snoopy and Linus were thrown under the bus by a Christian cleric. Good grief!

For all of you separation-of-church-and-state fans, here’s the deal: Jesus of Nazareth was a man. In fact, he was the most influential person ever born. A third of the world’s population has signed on to the Christian edicts: love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. That sounds like a good thing.

So, when President Grant honored Jesus by signing into law the national holiday of Christmas in 1870, the nation certified that a positive message of generosity and peace was worthy of a day off. Pretty much everybody was on board.

But not today. In our current state, the Thomas More Law Center has to litigate against attacks on Christmas every year. Anti-religion zealots put up billboards in Times Square denouncing Christmas as a “myth.” Rabid secularists bridle at any mention of Jesus or his nice mom and dad.

To them I say: Peace on Earth and tough. You don’t like the federal holiday? Try to rescind it. Start with our pal Lincoln Chafee. See how far you get with that.

And by the way, Merry Christmas to all. Even you loons.

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.”

# THE PRESS DAKOTAN

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

## Keep The Public’s Business Public

ARGUS LEADER, Sioux Falls (Dec. 18): Legislators in the upcoming session will hear why making criminal mug shots and other documents public should be the standard for South Dakota citizens.

That’s a good first step in bringing our state into modern times and a chance for the work of a 33-member open government panel to get a public hearing. The panel made the recommendations earlier this year.

Both Attorney General Marty Jackley and Gov. Dennis Daugaard are looking at backing eight bills that are designed to make South Dakota a more open state. Jackley doesn’t have any objections to the proposed changes, and Daugaard’s staff is working to make sure the wording is correct before the bills are proposed to lawmakers.

We encourage lawmakers to consider the bills from the presumption of openness. The bills are intended to get the state more in line with giving citizens the right to view information.

Most states, for example, release criminal mug shots. South Dakota law enforcement agencies are not required to do so. One of the bills would require state agencies to release a description of any databases they have, to give the public more information about what is available.

Other bills would extend open meeting laws to advisory bodies and open up some email conversations to ensure public boards are doing their work in public.

The committee had representatives with differing, yet well-rounded, views on the open government issues, and they came forward with reasonable recommendations. Lawmakers, too, might have additional bills they bring forward that would shine more light on the public’s business. We encourage that.

With backing from the attorney general and governor, we hope lawmakers and residents feel comfortable that opening up some government information is best for everyone. There might be a long way to go before all records that should be public fall into that category, but we’re pleased to be starting the process with some agreed-upon initial changes.

### THE VIEWS PAGE

The **PRESS & DAKOTAN** Views 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 to the editor on current topics. Questions regarding the Views page should be directed to Kelly Hertz at [views@yankton.net](mailto:views@yankton.net).

### TODAY IN HISTORY

**By The Associated Press**  
Today is Monday, Dec. 24, the 359th day of 2012. There are seven days left in the year. This is Christmas Eve.  
**Today’s Highlight in History:** On Dec. 24, 1955, the Continental Air Defense Command Operations Center in Colorado Springs, Colo., fielded a series of phone calls from children wanting to know the whereabouts of Santa Claus after an ad in a local newspaper mistakenly gave the Center’s number; thus began a tradition continued by the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) of tracking Santa’s location the night before Christmas.  
**On this date:** In 1524, Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama — who had discovered a sea route around Africa to India — died in Cochin, India.  
In 1814, the War of 1812 officially ended as the United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Ghent.  
In 1851, fire devastated the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., destroying about 35,000 volumes.  
In 1865, several veterans of the Confederate Army formed a private social club in Pulaski, Tenn., called the Ku Klux Klan.  
In 1871, Giuseppe Verdi’s opera “Aida” had its world premiere in Cairo, Egypt.  
In 1906, Canadian physicist Reginald A. Fessenden became the first person to transmit the human voice (his own) as well as music over radio, from Brant Rock, Mass.  
In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe as part of Operation Overlord.  
In 1951, Gian Carlo Menotti’s “Amahl and the Night Visitors,” the first opera written specifically for television, was first broadcast by NBC-TV.  
In 1968, the Apollo 8 astronauts, orbiting the moon, read passages from the Old Testament Book of Genesis during a Christmas Eve telecast.  
In 1980, Americans remembered the U.S. hostages in Iran by burning candles or shining lights for 417 seconds — one second for each day of captivity.  
In 1992, President George H.W. Bush pardoned former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and five others in connection with the Iran-Contra scandal. President-elect Bill Clinton chose Zoe Baird to be his attorney general, but the nomination fell apart over Baird’s hiring of illegal aliens as domestic workers.  
In 2000, a group of escaped convicts robbed a sporting goods store in Irving,

Texas; the robbery was interrupted by a police officer, Aubrey Hawkins, who was killed by the fugitive gang.

**Ten years ago:** Laci Peterson was reported missing from her Modesto, Calif., home, by her husband, Scott, who was later convicted of murdering her and their unborn son. Saddam Hussein said in an address read on television that Iraqis were ready to fight a holy war against the United States. Chinese pro-democracy activist Xu Wenli was released from a prison in Beijing and flown to the United States.  
**Five years ago:** President George W. Bush made Christmas Eve calls to 10 U.S. troops serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and other spots around the world, thanking them for their sacrifice and wishing them a happy holiday. French news cameraman Gwen Le Gouil was released eight days after he had been abducted by Somali gunmen outside the town of Bossaso.

**One year ago:** In a setback, Republican presidential hopefuls Newt Gingrich and Texas Gov. Rick Perry failed to qualify for Virginia’s Super Tuesday primary ballot by falling short of the 10,000 signatures required to appear on the ballot. Troops commanded by relatives of Yemen’s outgoing president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, attacked a crowd of more than 100,000 peaceful protesters, killing at least nine and driving Saleh to promise to leave the country. Pope Benedict XVI decried the increasing commercialization of Christmas as he celebrated Christmas Eve Mass.  
**Today’s Birthdays:** Songwriter-band-leader Dave Bartholomew is 92. Author Mary Higgins Clark is 85. Federal health official Anthony S. Fauci is 72. Recording company executive Mike Curb is 68. Rock singer-musician Lemmy (Motorhead) is 67. Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., is 66. Actor Grand L. Bush is 57. Actor Clarence Gilyard is 57. Actress Stephanie Hodge is 56. The president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, is 55. Rock musician Ian Burden (The Human League) is 55. Actor Anil Kapoor is 53. Actor Wade Williams is 51. Designer Kate Spade is 50. Rock singer Mary Ramsey (10,000 Maniacs) is 49. Actor Mark Valley is 48. Actor Diedrich Bader is 46. Actor Amaury Nolasco is 42. Singer Ricky Martin is 41. Author Stephanie Meyer (“Twilight”) is 39. “American Idol” host Ryan Seacrest is 38. Rock singer Louis Tomlinson (One Direction) is 21.

**Thought for Today:** “Christmas waves a magic wand over this world, and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful.” — The Rev. Norman Vincent Peale (born 1898, died this day in 1993).

### FROM THE BIBLE

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Matthew 46:16. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

### YOUR LETTERS

#### Thank You From Beadle

DeeRhonda Anderson, Yankton  
Chairman, Mindcore Marathon Beadle 2012

We had an awesome day at Beadle Elementary School on Monday, Dec. 17. Mindcore Marathon was a HUGE success.

In its first year for any of Yankton’s schools, I wondered how it would go with our students and the community. We had 100-plus adult volunteers spend their valuable time with us. Our students gathered pledges for questions they answered correctly on our marathon day. They studied diligently, were excited, and a tad bit nervous about being questioned by someone new to them. Their questions were not easy ... taken from the Common

Core Standards and our curriculum. You, who volunteered, were an integral part to our success in this fundraising campaign. Your smiles, friendliness, and encouragement allowed our students to stand taller, smile broader, and walk away from the event with a great feeling of success.

From our family helpers, Lions’ Club, Optimists, Legislators, Miss SD/Universe, Mount Marty Women’s basketball, MMC teachers, law enforcement officers, EMT’s, Chamber Members, YSD Staff administrators, former YSD teachers, and other cherished community members, we thank you from the bottom of our “Beadle Bug Hearts.”

We are so proud of Beadle and our Yankton support.

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