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## OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

# Challenging Hagel: Sign Of The Times?

**THE HAWK EYE, Burlington, Iowa (Dec. 22):** It’s a depressing reminder of just how messed up Washington is when Republicans get angry at a Democratic president who might hire a Republican to head the Pentagon. But the Obama administration, facing a fiscal crisis fomented by unyielding Republicans, had to waste valuable time to defend retired Nebraska Sen. Chuck Hagel, a Republican.

Hagel is among candidates President Barack Obama is considering to replace the retiring Leon Panetta as Secretary of Defense. Twice wounded in Vietnam, Hagel served two terms in the Senate before retiring a decade ago.

A rarity in his pragmatism and political moderation, Hagel endorsed Obama’s candidacy in 2008 and now serves on the president’s Intelligence Advisory Board.

His views and credentials make him a good fit for the task ahead, which is to persuade Congress to slash a staggering Pentagon budget bloated by billions of dollars of projects, personnel and equipment congressmen want for their districts but the Pentagon doesn’t want or need.

What has certain Republicans in a tizzy are Hagel’s foreign policy positions. As a senator, he referred to “the Jewish lobby” and its power to dictate U.S. Middle East policy in Israel’s favor, be it at the expense of the Palestinians’ legitimate claims or U.S. security. ...

As confirmation of his observation that pro-Israel lobby groups dictate U.S. policy, the Emergency Committee for Israel says it’s planning to air attack ads in the U.S. denouncing Hagel’s possible nomination. Republicans used the same smear tactics to derail U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice’s elevation to Secretary of State even before Obama nominated her. ...

There is a difference between being anti-Israel and being Israel’s pawn. Chuck Hagel apparently thinks that’s the way it should be. And most Americans, weary of Middle Eastern countries’ blood-drenched squabbles, agree.

## 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 Thursday, Dec. 27, the 362nd day of 2012. There are four days left in the year.

**Today’s Highlight in History:** On Dec. 27, 1932, New York City’s Radio City Music Hall opened to the public in midtown Manhattan. (Opening night, consisting of several hours of live acts, was considered a disaster, prompting the owners to shift to a format of showing a movie followed by a stage show.)

**On this date:** In 1512, King Ferdinand II issued the original Laws of Burgos, which were intended to regulate the treatment of indigenous people on Hispaniola by Spanish settlers.

In 1822, scientist Louis Pasteur was born in Dole, France.

In 1831, naturalist Charles Darwin set out on a round-the-world voyage aboard the *HMS Beagle*.

In 1904, James Barrie’s play “Peter Pan: The Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up” opened at the Duke of York’s Theater in London.

In 1927, the musical play “Show Boat,” with music by Jerome Kern and libretto by Oscar Hammerstein II, opened at the Ziegfeld Theater in New York.

In 1945, 28 nations signed an agreement creating the World Bank.

In 1947, the original version of the puppet character Howdy Doody made its TV debut on NBC’s “Puppet Playhouse.”

In 1949, Queen Juliana of the Netherlands signed an act recognizing Indonesia’s sovereignty after more than three centuries of Dutch rule.

In 1968, Apollo 8 and its three astronauts made a safe, nighttime splashdown in the Pacific.

In 1970, the musical play “Hello, Dolly!” closed on Broadway after a run of 2,844 performances.

In 1979, Soviet forces seized control of Afghanistan. President Hafizullah Amin, who was overthrown and executed, was replaced by Babrak Karmal.

In 1985, Palestinian guerrillas opened fire inside the Rome and Vienna airports; 19 victims were killed, plus four attackers who were slain by police and security personnel. American naturalist Dian Fossey, 53, who had studied gorillas in the wild in Rwanda, was found hacked to death.

**Ten years ago:** A defiant North Korea ordered U.N. nuclear inspectors to leave the country and said it would restart a laboratory capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. But the U.N. nuclear watchdog said its inspectors were “staying put” for the time being. A suicide truck-bomb attack destroyed the headquarters of

Chechnya’s Moscow-backed government, killing 72 people. Clonaid, a company founded by a religious sect that believes in space aliens, announced it had produced the world’s first cloned baby, a claim subsequently dismissed by scientists for lack of proof. Oscar-winning director George Roy Hill died in New York at age 81.

**Five years ago:** Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was assassinated during a suicide bomb attack in Pakistan following a campaign rally. Kenya held an election pitting incumbent president Mwai Kibaki against opposition candidate Raila Odinga; both candidates ended up claiming victory in a vote that observers said was seriously flawed. (Kenya was racked by weeks of ethnic violence; Kibaki and Odinga ended up forming a coalition government.)

**One year ago:** Tens of thousands of defiant Syrian protesters thronged the streets of Homs, calling for the execution of President Bashar Assad shortly after his army pulled its tanks back and allowed Arab League monitors in for the first time to the city at the heart of the anti-government uprising. Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska, a conservative Democrat, said he would retire from the Senate rather than seek a third term. Abstract expressionist painter Helen Frankenthaler, 83, known for her bold, lyrical use of color, died in Darien, Conn.

**Today’s Birthdays:** Rockabilly musician Scotty Moore is 81. Actor John Amos is 73. Actress Charmian Carr (Film: “The Sound of Music”) is 70. ABC News correspondent Cokie Roberts is 69. Rock musician Mick Jones (Foreigner) is 68. Singer Tracy Nelson is 68. Actor Gerard Depardieu is 64. Jazz singer-musician T.S. Monk is 63. Singer-songwriter Karla Bonoff is 61. Actress Tovah Feldshuh is 60. Rock musician David Knopfler (Dire Straits) is 60. Journalist-turned-politician Arthur Kent is 59. Actress Maryam D’Abo is 52. Country musician Jeff Bryant is 50. Actor Ian Gomez is 48. Actress Theresa Randle is 48. Actress Eva LaRue is 46. Former professional wrestler and actor Bill Goldberg is 46. Actress Tracey Cherelle Jones is 43. Bluegrass singer-musician Darin Vincent (Dailey & Vincent) is 43. Rock musician Guthrie Govan is 41. Musician Matt Slocum is 40. Actor Wilson Cruz is 39. Singer Olu is 39. Actor Masi Oka is 38. Actor Aaron Stanford is 36. Actress Emilie de Ravin is 31. Christian rock musician James Mead (Kutless) is 30. Rock singer Hayley Williams (Paramore) is 24.

**Thought for Today:** “I’m not young enough to know everything.” — Sir James Matthew Barrie, Scottish dramatist-author (1860-1937).

## FROM THE BIBLE

*An altar of earth you shall make for Me. ... In every place where I cause My name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. Exodus 20:24.*  
Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

## YOUR LETTERS

### Prayer In Schools

**Pam Frick, Yankton**

I am writing this as a letter to the editor of our daily newspaper and emailing it to my congressmen. If you feel so inclined you can do the same.

I don’t understand why it is so impossible to start a school day with a prayer for God’s protection and guidance. We all call upon God AFTER the tragedy. The president is even reading Scripture! AFTER the kids are dead. We all hold vigil services. Prayers are said throughout the country. As it should be. Madeline Murray O’Hara almost

singlehandedly made prayer in public schools in 1960s a crime! Isn’t it interesting that, that is where O’Hara wanted the prayer to stop — in the schools — and that is where the worst tragedies are taking place?

If the outcry in this country became loud enough I would think we could reverse that course and bring prayer back into our schools — Please, Lord God, Guide and Protect our Children.

Please contact your congressmen or woman and appeal to them — for our children’s sake — bring prayer back.

# Of Poetry And Tragedy

**BY DICK ALLEN**  
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The recent tragedy in Newtown, Conn., brings forth, understandably, questions about poetry. Can I communicate my grief by writing a poem? Can I find solace or an answer in poetry? Newspaper and magazine editors know, to their chagrin, that the response to the first question is “yes.” After any major tragedy readers besiege editors with many well meaning and deeply felt poems.

The avalanche of poems comes partially because all humans live in a daily fog that only now and then somewhat clears. A life-altering event — a significant birthday, a wedding, a death — causes the fog to lift. We suddenly feel ourselves wrenched from normal reality. For a while, we’re seeing, hearing and feeling with new clarity. The urge to share this clarity and its immediate realizations leads to the writing of poems.

And why poems? Because poetry, particularly traditional rhymed and metered poetry, is at its best a heightened use of language. It’s a form of art that can “lock” a realization into place, seemingly for all time. As one of my old professors used to say, “language measured and super-charged” at its best can be short enough to focus upon and even to memorize. It is not unusual to have poems used in ceremonies and rites.

So the poems come to our besieged editors. Well meaning. Scared. Haunted. Angry. Grieving. Devastated. Being occasional, written in the heat and sorrow of the moment, sadly most often these terribly sincere poems are not very good. Even when written by leading poets, they’re not very good. Anyone who reads the poems in anthologies constructed in the national grief following the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, following 9/11 and following Hurricane Katrina knows that in retrospect ... well, these occasional poems are not very good.

Why not? Poetry, wrote William Wordsworth in his famous “Preface to Lyrical Ballads,” is “the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility.” I’d argue that “recollected in tranquility” is what provides poetry’s greatest use: perspective. In addition to containing considered, crafted and revised and uniquely put language, one does not likely have perspective when responding immediately to a situation.

This element of perspective leads to the second question, Can one find solace or an answer in poetry? I think so.

An answer may arise because in reading a fine poem, more than likely a poem that’s already become well known, the reader is taken outside himself and encouraged to think clearly. The evocation may be as simple as in the lines from Archibald MacLeish’s “Ars Poetica,” “For all the history of grief

“An empty doorway and a maple leaf” or A.E. Houseman’s observation on the brevity of human life: “And since to look at things in bloom, “Fifty springs are little room, “About the woodlands I will go “To see the cherry hung with snow.” or Emily Dickinson’s poem, quoted here in full — a poem among others that I couldn’t get out of my head following the horrific Friday in Newtown: “There’s a certain slant of light, “Winter Afternoons —

“That oppresses, like the Heft “Of Cathedral tunes – “Heavenly Hurt, it gives us – “We can find no scar, “But internal difference, “Where the Meanings, are – “None may teach it – Any – “’Tis the Seal Despair – “An imperial affliction “Sent us of the Air – “When it comes, the Landscape listens – “Shadows — hold their Breath – “When it goes, ’tis like the Distance “On the look of Death –”

Over and over, the great poems provide needed perspective. They remind us, as W. H. Auden did in “September 1, 1939,” that “we must love one another, or die.” This admonition was even more true when Auden later altered the line to read, “We must love one another and die.”

Reading poems, writing them, thinking about them, memorizing them are acts of devotion. Any good book of poetry, any excellent poem, focuses one’s attention. Poems clarify us. A poem may be an act of meditation, as it might have been for the poet writing it and as it is now for those reading it. It may be a prayer. It can tell us that no matter what it is we’re feeling, others also have felt this way. It may gentle us. On occasion, with its ambiguity, it may make us see many ways at once.

Or it may instruct us. In T. S. Eliot’s words from his “Ash Wednesday,”

“Teach us to care and not to care “Teach us to sit still “Even among these rocks, “Our peace in His will ... “And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea, “Suffer me not to be separated “And let my cry come unto Thee.”

Poetry causes us to be, in the Zen Buddhists’ term, “mindful.” And to be mindful is to become acutely aware of every moment. It is to cherish each individual moment even in our stunned lack of comprehension of the whole of life and death — as certainly the Newtown tragedy has caused us for even a short while to be so stunned.

The Japanese poet Matsuo Boshō’s haiku, the most famous poem in Japan, lets us focus on this Present. No moment is trivial:

“Furuike ya “kawazu tobikomu “mizu no oto” or translated: “The old pond — “a frog jumps in, “sound of water”

This focus on the acute perception that just to hear a frog splash, just to have a chance to be alive, even for a very brief time, as the Newtown children were, is marvelous, a treasure. a revelation, a gift, an unforgettableness. It may also remind us of a poetic admonition by a Zen Master, one expressed to his disciple as they were walking in the rain. The admonition says simply what must be said always:

“Do not walk so fast, the rain is everywhere.”

*Dick Allen is Connecticut’s state poet laureate. His eighth poetry collection, “This Shadowy Place,” will be published next year. He wrote this for the Hartford Courant.*

# 2012: The Best, Worst And Most

**BY JOE GANDELMAN**  
CagleCartoons.com

Here’s my annual list looking at 2012:

- Worst Political Primary Performance of the Year: Texas Gov. Rick Perry’s run for president. It wasn’t just his lackluster performance, forgetting his own program during a debate, or that video suggesting he had either an attack of giddiness or more than a few drinks. Perry never lived up to his advance mainstream and conservative media hype. He was not ready for the national stage. There are signs he will try it again in 2016 and maybe by then he will.
- Best Political Comeback: California Gov. Jerry Brown. He was once California’s youngest governor, and if he’s re-elected will be its oldest. Some considered him a political goner as his referendum to raise taxes seemed sagging, but it won. The Politico notes that Brown “has staged a comeback this year that Bill Clinton could appreciate.”
- Worst Political Pundit Since the Time of Moses: Fox News’ Dick Morris. He has no shame.
- The Best TV Show: “Breaking Bad.” Better than The Sopranos. A work of art on several levels.
- The Second Best Political Comeback: Former President Bill Clinton, who laid to rest perceptions that he might have lost his political chops. His Democratic Convention speech confirmed him as one of the most talented politicians of his generation.
- The Most Obnoxious Phrase of 2012: “Thanks for having me,” uttered like a mantra by cable news and ideological talk show guests. I’ve said that to my mother on Mother’s Day.
- The Talk Show Hosts with the Most Annoying Habits: Both on MSNBC. Rachael Maddow seems to think she needs to repeat a phrase or idea four or five times before going onto the next one. Four or five times she’ll say the same phrase but repeat it. A phrase — she’ll take it and repeat it four or five times. Runner up: Martin Bashir (increasingly the left’s equivalent of Fox News’ Sean Hannity) who constantly uses the word “indeed” like a parrot. (Indeed.)

- The Best Example of a Serious Problem-Solver: Mitt Romney surrogate New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie’s willingness to actually say something nice about President Barack Obama. Christie’s working with him in Hurricane Sandy’s devastating aftermath is how our politics used to work — when partisan hackery was put aside during crises.
- The Most Clear-cut Examples of Trying to Get Someone Because They Disagree: More than 30,000 Americans signed a petition to try and get CNN’s Piers Morgan deported because of his strong gun-control stand. Some conservatives suggested NBC’s David Gregory should be arrested for violating D.C.’s ban of possession of a high capacity ammunition magazine by showing one during his aggressive interview NRA bigwig Wayne LaPierre. So they want Morgan out of the U.S. and Gregory in jail. This does seem a bit of a shift from how we used to conduct our political debate — doesn’t it?
- The Worst Thing to Happen: The murder of virtual babies and dedicated educators at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.
- The Most Predictable Thing to Happen: The Newtown massacre spawned statements decrying the butchery, and vows that assault weapon laws would be adjusted. The NRA kept mum until LaPierre gave a guns-are-blameless, caricature-affirming, press conference saying no to changing laws. Now the political class may be getting back to “normal”: pro-NRA politicians are falling into line and little or nothing may be done. The answer to “how quickly they forget” may be: “Very.” The American public’s will be: “Never.”
- The Best Pizza: STILL Pepe’s Pizza in New Haven, Conn.

*Joe Gandelman is a veteran journalist who wrote for newspapers overseas and in the United States. He has appeared on cable news show political panels and is Editor-in-Chief of The Moderate Voice, an Internet hub for independents, centrists and moderates. CNN’s John Avlon named him as one of the top 25 Centrists Columnists and Commentators. He can be reached at [jgandelman@themoderatevoice.com](mailto:jgandelman@themoderatevoice.com).*

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