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OPINION | OUR VIEW

Free Speech And 'Duck' Diversions

Just in time for holiday table talk: The flap over the suspension of one of the stars from the hit reality TV series "Duck Dynasty" has ignited a new round of culture warfare, drawing us away from the usual rounds of demagoguery tied to the alleged "war on Christmas." (Note on the latter: Look around — Christmas is winning.)

In this particular clash, Phil Robertson, the patriarchal leader of the "Duck Dynasty" clan, gave an interview in *GQ* magazine in which he made some anti-gay remarks, as well as (to a lesser extent) some racial comments that haven't gone down real well. In response, officials at A&E, the network that airs the reality show, suspended Robertson.

This has drawn the ire of the show's fans, and has fueled some opportune consternation among some politicians, all of whom are declaring that Robertson has a right to speak his opinions in this land founded on free speech. (The award for asinine hyperbole on this issue goes to Illinois Republican congressional candidate Ian Bayne, who said on his website that Robertson "is the Rosa Parks of our generation." That statement blathers for itself.)

This is being portrayed by many people as a First Amendment matter, which is valid to an extent — but then pointless beyond that boundary.

As an American, Robertson certainly has a right to opinions and a right to air them. That's clear.

However, Robertson is also associated with, employed by and rigorously promoted by the A&E network, which owns the "Duck Dynasty" television franchise. The network also has certain rights of free speech, and it can also carry expectations of how it wants its employees and associates to act for public consumption. Robertson's anti-gay comments put the network in a tough spot: It could stick by its star and offend a segment of its audience, or it could issue a punishment and offend another sector of its audience. Thus, Robertson bears some burden of responsibility for creating this dicey corporate situation, in which both he and the network could take a big financial hit.

And while we're at it, remember that this involves someone from the realm of something called "reality television," which basically means it's about as far removed from reality as most anything else you see on the screen. For proof, one needs only to wander around the stores these days to see the staggering array of "Duck Dynasty" merchandise being marketed to consumers. The faces of these bearded souls are ubiquitous this holiday season. There are millions of dollars tied up in these ventures, and anything that threatens to derail this money train should be a concern, especially to those who figure to cash in on it. (Thus, Robertson's family should also be rather put off by the patriarch's comments on monetary grounds.) This isn't a "reality" that most of us can honestly identify with, so we shouldn't be seeing these people as reflections of ourselves, our lives and our own freedoms.

Overall, however, these factors should not obscure the fact that seizing upon "Duck Dynasty" as some kind of yardstick for measuring whether you are or aren't for gay rights is just painfully absurd — painful because it's rather typical of our disposable, celebrity-obsessed culture.

All of this will be forgotten in time. Many politicians and cultural warriors on both sides of the issue will grandstand before dialing it all back down while waiting for the next flashpoint to present itself. A&E will soft-pedal its stand and will be chastised for it — and will be contrite all the way to the bank. Robertson will return to his show eventually (it's already reported he will likely be back in January), "Duck Dynasty" will likely see even larger ratings for the short term and, at least on the culture war front, nothing will be settled. That is the only reality that matters here.

kmh

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press

Today is Tuesday, Dec. 24, the 358th day of 2013. There are seven days left in the year. This is Christmas Eve.

**Today's Highlight in History:** On Dec. 24, 1913, 73 people, most of them children, died in a crush of panic after someone falsely called out "Fire!" during a Christmas party for striking miners and their families at the Italian Hall in Calumet, Mich.

**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 1863, English novelist William Makepeace Thackeray, author of "Vanity Fair," died in London at age 52.

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 1993, the Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, who blended Christian and psychiatric principles into a message of "positive thinking," died in Pawling, N.Y., at age 95.

**Ten years ago:** A roadside bomb exploded north of Baghdad, killing three U.S. soldiers in the deadliest attack on Americans to that time following Saddam Hussein's capture. Air

France canceled several flights to the United States after U.S. officials passed on what were termed "credible" security threats.

**Five years ago:** A man dressed in a Santa Claus suit shot his way into the Covina, Calif., home of his former in-laws and set it on fire, killing nine people (the attacker, identified as Bruce Jeffrey Pardo, committed suicide the next day). The Federal Reserve granted a request by the financing arm of General Motors to tap the government's \$700 billion rescue fund, bolstering GM's ability to survive. Army Capt. Moussa Camara, the leader of a coup in Guinea, entered the country's capital, hours after saying his group would hold power until elections in two years. Nobel Prize-winning playwright Harold Pinter died in London at age 78.

**One year ago:** An Afghan policeman walked into a high-security compound in Kabul and killed an American contractor, the first such shooting by a woman in a spate of insider attacks by Afghans against their foreign allies. An ex-con gunned down two firefighters in Webster, N.Y., after luring them to his suburban Rochester neighborhood by setting a car and a house ablaze, then took shots at police and committed suicide while several homes burned. Death claimed actors Charles Durning, 89, and Jack Klugman, 90.

**Today's Birthdays:** Songwriter-bandleader Dave Bartholomew is 93. Author Mary Higgins Clark is 86. Federal health official Anthony S. Fauci is 73. Recording company executive Mike Curb is 69. Rock singer-musician Lemmy (Motorhead) is 68. Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., is 67. Actor Grand L. Bush is 58. Actor Clarence Gilyard is 58. Actress Stephanie Hodge is 57. The president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, is 56. Rock musician Ian Burden (The Human League) is 56. Actor Anil Kapoor is 54. Actor Wade Williams is 52. Designer Kate Spade is 51. Rock singer Mary Ramsey (10,000 Maniacs) is 50. Actor Mark Valley is 49. Actor Diedrich Bader is 47. Actor Amaury Nolasco is 43. Singer Ricky Martin is 42. Author Stephenie Meyer is 40. "American Idol" host Ryan Seacrest is 39. Actor Michael Raymond-James (TV: "Once Upon a Time") is 36. Rock singer Louis Tomlinson (One Direction) is 22.

**Thought for Today:** "Christmas is the day that holds all time together." — Alexander Smith, Scottish poet and essayist (1830-1867).

FROM THE BIBLE

*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Luke 2:10. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis*

'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.

*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.*



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 supernatural 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.

Defending The Christmas Spirit

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.

There is something to the argument that



Bill O'REILLY

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."*

YOUR LETTERS

A Promising Treatment

John Magnuson, Yankton

The *Press and Dakotan* did a story last March about a local gentleman who received a stem cell injection in his hip so he would not require a hip replacement surgery. At the time of the article he seemed pretty satisfied with the results.

This kind of news is very interesting to a lot of us arthritis sufferers who may be pending a joint replacement sometime in the future, but have been told by our doctors that it will have to get a lot worse before this will happen. In other words you will have to be in a considerable amount of pain and almost crippled before surgery is an option. Like the kids say today, this SUCKS.

This story was also of personal interest to me because of early degeneration in one of my hips which was painful and causing some limping at times. I discovered that a Dr. Michael Martin of the South Point Family Physicians in Lincoln, Neb., was performing these procedures. I had a same-day, out-patient procedure performed last month and I have to honestly say the results are amazing. I was a little skeptical at first but am now very thankful that I did this. The procedure used

Online Opinion

The results of the most recent Internet poll on the *Press & Dakotan's* Web site are as follows:

LATEST RESULTS:

Do you think Leslie Frazier will be back to coach the Minnesota Vikings in 2014?

I don't care ..... 43%  
No ..... 41%  
Yes ..... 16%  
TOTAL VOTES CAST ..... 253

*The Press & Dakotan Internet poll is not a scientific survey and reflects the opinions only of those who choose to participate. The results should not be construed as an accurate representation or scientific measurement of public opinion.*

CURRENT QUESTION:

Should South Dakota abolish the death penalty? To vote in the *Press & Dakotan's* Internet poll, log on to our website at www.yankton.net.

stem cells from my stomach fat and was combined with my enriched blood plasma. An injection was guided by ultra sound. Dr. Martin is a very fine gentleman and believes that this will be common practice in the future.

I hope he is right and I also hope this article might help one of you. Merry Christmas!