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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Obama Wrapping Up A Tough Year

KANSAS CITY STAR (Dec. 23): We have it on good authority — the authority of the gods of speculation, that is — that President Barack Obama has arranged for the delivery of Christmas stockings stuffed with lumps of coal to a few people in his circle.

Of course, he's struggling to express good seasonal wishes for the likes of Bashar Assad, Vladimir Putin and Ted Cruz. But closer to home, the coal, as opposed to solar collectors or wind turbine blades, will make a real point for these people:

- Kathleen Sebelius, Health and Human Services secretary, and Marilyn Tavenner, head of the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services and principal overseer of HealthCare.gov. Who's on first? And who knew what when? And why did no one in authority speak up when it became clear, perhaps many weeks before the scheduled rollout, that the HealthCare.gov website was majorly screwed up?

- The Oct. 1 setback put a screeching halt to the GOP's political swan dive, which had been accelerated by the government shutdown in September. But more important, it threatened (and still does) to undermine the president's credibility and overall sense of accomplishment.

- National Security Agency director, Gen. Keith Alexander, and James Clapper, director of national intelligence. How could the super-secret spy agency have had a system in place that failed to catch a contractor's employee, Edward Snowden, from copying and fleeing with thousands of pages of internal documents?

The Snowden affair, of course, led to enormous bad press for the president and the nation, although it also has led to a necessary, public discussion of the use and limits of surveillance in our time.

How could Alexander and his people not foresee the pitfalls of scooping up the metadata — who'd you call, when and for how long? — of every American's phone usage? And how could Clapper think he could get away with misleading Congress on the scope of American spying?

Last week an independent advisory panel, engaged after the Snowden revelations, recommended 46 specific alterations to current NSA policies and procedures. Obama plans to say yea or nay to those recommendations in January and no doubt wishes he hadn't been pushed into such a corner.

- Himself: For that dumbbell mantra that overstated the promise of the Affordable Care Act — "If you like the plan you have, you'll be able to keep it." On the oops meter, this was a classic and highly disappointing spike. Not only did it present the president as a wishful and faulty thinker, it gave his opponents potent ammunition. There's not much upside when faced with the question: Did he lie or was he ignorant of Obamacare's true consequences?

Beginning with Beyonce's lip-synced inaugural anthem, this has not been a happy year for Obama. Many of his longtime supporters have grown tired of the bumbling, the buoyant sweet talk and the president's lack of urgent engagement when it's most needed. And many fear the consequences of complacency — especially among Obama's former supporters — and White House ineptitude remain the operative trends in the months ahead.

The coming year will bring more major tests of the president's leadership, of the lingering effects of his administration's false steps and of the alluring power of progressive ideas and policies. ...

The countdown to midterm elections — and the endless political calculations they trigger all along the spectrum — are well under way. Let's hope that by the end of 2014, the president will be doling out more gold stars than lumps of coal.

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, Dec. 26, the 360th day of 2013. There are five days left in the year. The seven-day African-American holiday Kwanzaa begins today. This is Boxing Day.

Today's Highlight in History: On Dec. 26, 1776, the British suffered a major defeat in the Battle of Trenton during the Revolutionary War.

On this date: In 1799, former President George Washington was eulogized by Col. Henry Lee as "first in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

In 1862, 38 Santee Sioux Indians were hanged in Mankato, Minn., for their roles in an uprising that had claimed the lives of hundreds of white settlers. The Civil War Battle of Chickasaw Bayou, resulting in a Confederate victory, began in Mississippi.

In 1908, Jack Johnson became the first African-American boxer to win the world heavyweight championship as he defeated Canadian Tommy Burns in Sydney, Australia.

In 1933, Nissan Motor Co. was founded in Yokohama, Japan, as the Automobile Manufacturing Co.

In 1943, the German battleship *Scharnhorst* was sunk by British naval forces during the Battle of the North Cape off Norway; only 36 of its crew of more than 1,900 survived.

In 1944, during the World War II Battle of the Bulge, the embattled U.S. 101st Airborne Division in Bastogne, Belgium, was relieved by units of the 4th Armored Division.

In 1966, Kwanzaa was first celebrated.

In 1972, the 33rd president of the United States, Harry S. Truman, died in Kansas City, Mo., at age 88.

In 1973, the demon-possession horror film "The Exorcist" was released.

In 1996, 6-year-old beauty queen JonBenet Ramsey was found beaten and strangled in the basement of her family's home in Boulder, Colo. (To date, the slaying remains unsolved.)

In 2004, some 230,000 people, mostly in southern Asia, were killed by a tsunami triggered by the world's most powerful earthquake in 40 years beneath the Indian Ocean.

In 2006, former President Gerald R. Ford died in Rancho Mirage, Calif., at age 93.

Ten years ago: An earthquake struck the historic Iranian city of Bam, killing at least 26,000 people. Three snowboarders were killed in an avalanche in Provo Canyon, Utah.

Five years ago: Caroline Kennedy emerged from weeks of near-silence about her bid for a New York Senate seat; in an interview with The Associated Press and NY1 television, the daughter of President John F. Kennedy said she felt compelled to answer the call to service issued by her father a generation earlier. (Kennedy later dropped her bid; Kirsten Gillibrand was appointed by New York Gov. David Paterson.)

One year ago: Toyota Motor Corp. said it had reached a settlement worth more than \$1 billion in a case involving unintended acceleration problems in its vehicles. Old-guard veteran Shinzo Abe was voted back into office as Japan's prime minister. Gerry Anderson, 83, British puppetry pioneer and creator of the sci-fi TV show "Thunderbirds," died near Oxfordshire, England. Soul singer Fontella Bass, 72, died in St. Louis.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Donald Moffat is 83. Actor Carol Spinney (Big Bird on TV's "Sesame Street") is 80. Rhythm-and-blues singer Abdul "Duke" Fakir (The Four Tops) is 78. Record producer Phil Spector is 74. "America's Most Wanted" host John Walsh is 68. Country musician Bob Carpenter (The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band) is 67. Baseball Hall of Fame catcher Carlton Fisk is 66. Retired MLB All-Star Chris Chambliss is 65. Baseball Hall of Famer Ozzie Smith is 59. Former Sen. Evan Bayh, D-Ind., is 58. Humorist David Sedaris is 57. Rock musician James Kottak (The Scorpions) is 51. Country musician Brian Westrum (Sons of the Desert) is 51. Rock musician Lars Ulrich (Metallica) is 50. Actress Nadia Dajani is 48. Rock musician J is 46. Country singer Audrey Wiggins is 46. Rock musician Peter Dinklage (Candlebox) is 44. Rock singer James Mercer (The Shins; Flake) is 43. Actor-singer Jared Leto is 42. Actress Kendra C. Johnson (TV: "Love Thy Neighbor") is 37. Rock singer Chris Daughtry is 34. Actress Beth Behrs is 28. Actor Kit Harington (TV: "Game of Thrones") is 27. Actress Eden Sher is 22. Pop singer Jade Thirlwall (Little Mix) is 21. Actor Zach Mills is 18.

Thought for Today: "Christmas has come and gone, and I — to speak selfishly — am glad of it. The season always gives me the blues in spite of myself, though I manage to get a good deal of pleasure from thinking of the multitudes of happy kids in various parts of the world." — Edwin Arlington Robinson, American poet (1869-1935).

FROM THE BIBLE

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm 23:1. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

YOUR LETTERS

Fabulous Feast!

Yankton Community Holiday Feast Committee

The Yankton Community Holiday Feast Committee would like to say "Thank you" to all who volunteered and contributed to The Feast this year. We had another successful year and without the support from our community, we would not see all of the friends and neighbors come to share in this event. It is

nice to share a delicious meal and The Feast allowed the committee to be part of your Thanksgiving celebration and start the holiday season. We would not be able to have this celebration if it were not for people like you who support the activities that are happening in Yankton. We served a large crowd at Calvary Baptist Church this year and we look forward to seeing you at The Feast in 2014.



The Rez of the Story

Respect And Support

BY VINCE TWO EAGLES

Hau Mitakuepi (Greetings My Relatives), The eminent Native author and thinker, Vine Deloria Jr. from the Standing Rock Lakota people, who began his journey to the other world in 2005, once wrote:

"In this universe, all activities, events, and entities are related. Indians believe that everything in the universe has value and instructs us in some aspect of life. Everything is alive and is making choices that determine the future, so the world is constantly creating itself. ... With the wisdom and time for reflection that old age provides, we may discover unsuspected relationships."

Two of my favorite authors, Karen Casey and Martha Vanceburg remind us, "Human beings have been known to act toward other people as though they were things, objects, instead of subjects like ourselves. Men sometimes act this way toward women; parents toward children; the young toward the old. This behavior has been most obvious and brutal toward the original inhabitants of some territory that others wish to colonize. As the world runs out of secrets, and no place is left open to colonial assaults, we must guard against this tendency among ourselves [all of us]. We can see it in military organizations and in industrial production, in bureaucracy and in mass movements. It's called disrespect for the individual, and it is always dangerous. Each human being is precious and unique. It injures our spirit to forget that, even for a moment. And when we remember it, we're better able to act in concert with our self-respecting fellows. In respecting ourselves fully, we show others how to treat us; and as we treat them respectfully we acknowledge and enhance their humanity. The quality of human interaction can be so wonderful; why should we deface it by forgetting others' uniqueness?"

Every year, columnists, pundits and just about every media outlet you can think of share their retrospectives of the previous year. Looking back not only at last year but at many past years, Native people's agendas have not been included in the American national conversation. We have been relegated to the margins of American history as relics and curiosities. The exception to this state-



Vince TWO EAGLES

ment being the exploitation of Native people who are being subjected to and belittled by national sports teams as mascots for their respective teams; such as the Cleveland Indians baseball team, the Kansas City Chiefs and the Washington Redskins.

Casey and Vanceburg go on to say, "The world has always been as rich and varied as it is at this moment. Wealth and poverty, joy and pain, peace and struggle have always existed side by side. The history of human life is the history of each person's [peoples] journey from birth to death. When we study history, we're always reading someone's interpretation or argument. The total history could never argue a point or prove an interpretation. We can tell many true stories about ourselves by selecting facts from our personal histories. Yet our total history will cancel these stories and show us to be neither saints nor villains, merely seekers. There's much we can learn from each other's stories. They can illuminate our path; they can persuade us of the wisdom of one choice or another. Yet to be fully human is to escape the neat outlines of such a story. We immerse ourselves in life; we are surrounded by it."

What, then, ever happened to respect? The author Hermann Hesse tells us, "It may be important to great thinkers to examine the world, to explain and despise it. But I think it is only important to love the world, not to despise it, not for us to hate each other, but to be able to regard the world and ourselves and all beings with love, admiration and respect." I would simply add to this that we ought to be doing this all the time and not just around this or any other holiday season.

I call on all our non-Indian relatives to support the struggle Indian people are engaged in to hold on to their culture and language, and carry forward their unique agenda. Support — not ridicule, not undermining or second-guessing the Native agenda — is the new challenge for 2014 and beyond. When one is not free, then all are not free. When one is being oppressed, all are being oppressed, right?

Happy Holidays my relatives and may you have a joyful and prosperous new year, however you define it.

And now you know the rez of the story. Doksha (later) ...

Slipping Out Of Reach?

BY ROBERT B. REICH

Tribune Content Agency

It's the season to show concern for the less fortunate among us. We should also be concerned about the widening gap between the most fortunate and everyone else.

Although it's still possible to win the lottery (your chance of winning \$648 million in the recent Mega Millions sweepstakes was one in 259 million), the biggest lottery of all is what family we're born into. Our chances in life are now determined to an unprecedented degree by the wealth of our parents.

That's not always been the case. The faith that anyone could move from rags to riches — with enough guts and gumption, hard work and nose to the grindstone — was once at the core of the American Dream.

And equal opportunity was the heart of the American creed. Although imperfectly achieved, that ideal eventually propelled us to overcome legalized segregation by race, and to guarantee civil rights. It fueled efforts to improve all of our schools and widen access to higher education. It pushed the nation to help the unemployed, raise the minimum wage, and provide pathways to good jobs. Much of this was financed by taxes on the most fortunate.

But for more than three decades we've been going backwards. It's far more difficult today for a child from a poor family to become a middle-class or wealthy adult. Or even for a middle-class child to become wealthy.

The major reason is widening inequality. The longer the ladder, the harder the climb. America is now more unequal than it's been for 80 or more years, with the most unequal distribution of income and wealth of all developed nations. Equal opportunity has become a pipe dream.

Rather than respond with policies to reverse the trend and get us back on the road to equal opportunity and widely shared prosperity, we've spent much of the last three decades doing the opposite. Taxes have been cut on the rich, public schools have deteriorated, higher education has become unaffordable for many, safety nets have been shredded, and the minimum wage has been allowed to drop 30 percent below where it was in 1968, adjusted for inflation.

Congress has just passed a tiny bipartisan budget agreement, and the Federal Reserve has decided to wean the economy off artificially low interest rates. Both decisions reflect Washington's (and Wall Street's) assumption that the economy is almost back on track.

But it's not at all back on the track it was on



Robert REICH

more than three decades ago.

It's certainly not on track for the record 4 million Americans now unemployed for more than six months, or for the unprecedented 20 million American children in poverty (we now have the highest rate of child poverty of all developed nations other than Romania), or for the third of all working Americans whose jobs are now part-time or temporary, or for the majority of Americans whose real wages continue to drop.

How can the economy be back on track when 95 percent of the economic gains since the recovery began in 2009 have gone to the richest 1 percent?

The underlying issue is a moral one: What do we owe one another as members of the same society?

Conservatives answer that question by saying it's a matter of personal choice — of charitable works, philanthropy and individual acts of kindness joined in "a thousand points of light." But that leaves out what we could and should seek to accomplish together as a society. It neglects the organization of our economy, and its social consequences. It minimizes the potential role of democracy in determining the rules of the game, as well as the corruption of democracy by big money. It overlooks our strivings for social justice.

In short, it ducks the meaning of a decent society.

Pope Francis recently wondered aloud whether "trickle-down theories, which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness." Rush Limbaugh accused the Pope of being a Marxist for merely raising the issue.

But the question of how to bring about greater justice and inclusiveness is as American as apple pie. It has animated our efforts for more than a century — during the Progressive Era, the New Deal, the Great Society and beyond — to make capitalism work for the betterment of all rather than for the enrichment of a few.

The supply-side, trickle-down, market-fundamentalist views that took root in America in the early 1980s got us fundamentally off track.

To get back to the kind of shared prosperity and upward mobility we once considered normal will require another era of fundamental reform, of both our economy and our democracy.

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," was released last month. He blogs at www.robertreich.org.