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OPINION | OUR VIEW

2013: A Year Of **Going Nowhere**

n this final day of a tired, fading 2013, it would not be totally unfair to say that this was a year that went nowhere — and that would be a kind assessment.

That may seem overly broad and unfair, but based on selective issues, one could conclude there has been a lot of wheel-spinning these past 12 months.

The year began literally with Congress locked in holiday session to cut a budget deal. In the months thereafter, the sequestration cuts — another result of stalemate - kicked and, in October, the federal government partially shut down for 17 days, putting tens of thousands of people out of work. At year's end, we did see a budget deal emerge from the Senate, but the failure to come up with an extension of federal unemployment benefits left more than 1 million long-term unemployed out in the cold.

There was no new Farm Bill looming at the beginning of the year; we still do not have one now.

As the year ends, we see only a modest improvement in the crippling D.C. bipartisanship, and the prospect of it all blowing up again without an extension of the debt ceiling makes even that step forward seem fragile. Thus, our "Washington problem" seems far from settled, and with 2014 being an election year, there is little chance any of that will significantly change.

We saw domestic surveillance exposed by an informant who left the country instead of standing his ground here. Nevertheless, Edward Snowden's revelations of the National Security Agency (NSA) metadata phone program showed Americans that they are under more government scrutiny than they may have ever imagined. Revealing this program seemed to be a fatal blow to this particular practice, but in the last week, a federal judge ruled that such programs may in fact be legal.

Healthcare reform came into 2013 on the back burner, but the disastrous rollout of the health care exchange ignited new doubts about the program. President Obama's wayward claim that people can keep their insurance they like, while true for more than 90 percent of Americans, withered under the realities of new requirements that undercut many of the so-called "junk insurance" packages served up by insurers. At year's end, the signup program seems to be running better, and the heavy traffic at the site indicates there is considerable interest in the exchanges. But the opposition has stiffened once more, which means this will be another political hand grenade during the 2014 election cycle.

As 2013 opened, thousands of people lacked insurance coverage in South Dakota. By year's end, the state had still failed to opt for Medicaid expansion, leaving those thousands uncovered — and there is no clear evidence of change in sight.

Locally, Yankton's sales tax income for the year was flat, and the building permits for both the city and county were down. While these are only three indicators, it does suggest that the economic recovery

here, at least, is merely idling, not accelerating. All these samples suggest it was a year that really saw little progress in undoing the knots, clarifying the uncertainties and moving down a more prosperous path. We were stuck in neutral, it seems, leaving us

with just as many questions as we exit the year as we had coming in. So ends 2013. We can hope — and should demand — much more in

ONLINE OPINION

the year to come.

The results of the most recent Internet poll on the Press & Dakotan's Web

LATEST RESULTS:

Do you think the U.S. should pardon Edward Snowden?	
No	59%
Yes	28%
Not sure	13%
TOTAL VOTES CAST	
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:

Do you make New Year's resolutions? To vote in the Press & Dakotan's Internet poll, log on to our website at www.yank-

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press

Today is Tuesday, Dec. 31, the 365th and final day of 2013.

Today's Highlight in History: On Dec. 31, 1879, Thomas Edison first publicly demonstrated his electric incandes-

on this date: In 1775, during the Revolutionary War, the British repulsed an attack by Continental Army generals Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold at Quebec; Montgomery was

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed an enabling act paving the way for Virginia's western counties to be-come the state of West Virginia, which

took place in June 1863. In 1909, the Manhattan Bridge, spanning the East River between Man-hattan and Brooklyn, was officially

opened to vehicular traffic. In 1942, Frank Sinatra opened a singing engagement at New York's Paramount Theater.

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman officially proclaimed the end of hostilities in World War II

In 1951, the Marshall Plan expired after distributing more than \$12 billion in

foreign aid. In 1969, Joseph A. Yablonski, an unsuccessful candidate for the presidency of the United Mine Workers of America was shot to death with his wife and daughter in their Clarksville, Pa., home by hitmen acting at the orders of UMWA

president Tony Boyle. In 1972, Major League baseball player Roberto Clemente, 38, was killed when a plane he'd chartered and was traveling on to bring relief supplies to earthquake-devastated Nicaragua crashed shortly after takeoff from Puerto

In 1985, singer Rick Nelson, 45, and six other people were killed when fire broke out aboard a DC-3 that was taking the group to a New Year's Eve performance in Dallas

In 1986, 97 people were killed when fire broke out in the Dupont Plaza Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico. (Three hotel workers later pleaded guilty in connection with the blaze.)

In 1987, Robert Mugabe, prime minister of Zimbabwe, was sworn in as the country's first executive president

In 1993, Brandon Teena, a 21-yearold female-born transgender, was slain along with two other people at a farmhouse near Humboldt, Neb. (Convicted murderer John Lotter is on Nebraska's death row; co-defendant Thomas Nissen

is serving a life sentence. The case in spired the 1999 movie "Boys Don't Cry.")

Ten years ago: A car bomb ripped

through a crowded restaurant hosting a New Year's Eve party in Baghdad, Iraq, killing eight Iragis. Five years ago: The U.N. Security

Council held an emergency meeting on an Arab request for a binding and enforceable resolution condemning Israel and halting its military attacks on Gaza. A man left four gift-wrapped bombs in downtown Aspen, Colo. in a bank-robbery attempt, turning New Year's Eve celebrations into a mass evacuation. (The man, identified as 72-year-old James Chester Blanning, shot and killed himself.) A woman gave birth aboard Northwest Airlines Flight 59 while en route from Amsterdam to Boston

One year ago: Racing the clock, the White House reached a New Year's Eve accord with Senate Republicans to block across-the-board tax increases and spending cuts in government programs due to take effect at midnight. Recreational marijuana clubs opened in Colorado, less than a month after Gov. John Hickenlooper signed into law a constitutional amendment allowing recreational pot use. Seven NFL coaches and five general managers were fired in a flurry of sackings the day after the regular sea-

Today's Birthdays: TV producer George Schlatter is 84. Actor Sir Anthony Hopkins is 76. Actor Tim Considine (TV: "My Three Sons") is 73. Actress Sarah Miles is 72. Rock musician Andy Summers is 71. Actor Sir Ben Kingsley is 70. Producer-director Taylor Hackford is 69. Fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg is 67. Actor Tim Matheson is 66. Pop singer Burton Cummings is 66. Actor Joe Dallesandro is 65. Rock musician Tom Hamilton (Aerosmith) is 62. Actor James Remar is 60. Actress Bebe Neuwirth is 55. Actor Val Kilmer is 54. Singer Paul Westerberg is 54. Actor Don Diamont is 51. Rock musician Ric Ivanisevich (Oleander) is 51. Rock musician Scott Ian (Anthrax) is 50. Actress Gong Li is 48. Author Nicholas Sparks is 48. Actor Lance Reddick is 44. Pop singer Joe McIntyre is 41. Rock musician Mikko Siren (Apocalyptica) is 38. Rapper PSY (Park Jae-sang) is 36. Rock musi-cian Bob Bryar is 34. Olympic gold medal gymnast Gabby Douglas is 18.

Thought for Today: "Drop the last rear into the silent limbo of the past. Let it go, for it was imperfect, and thank God that it can go." — Brooks Atkinson, American drama critic (1894-1984).

FROM THE BIBLE

Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? Ecclesiastes 5:6. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis



Thanks For The Memories

Kathleen

PARKER

BY KATHLEEN PARKER

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WASHINGTON - The year-end review required of all columnists inevitably brings us to the mailbag and a few clarifications.

For the record, I read my mail but never online comments. Anonymity liberates hostility, we've learned, and the customary online abuse riot undermines the grandiosity required to write opinion. But don't stop! For some reason, my family thinks the comments

The mail that does reach my inbox is about evenly split between fans and not-so-fans. I've concluded that there must be a repository of letter-to-columnist templates out there somewhere. About 70 percent of missives begin with one of the following:

 "I usually stop reading your column after the first sentence, but ..."

'I rarely agree with you, but ... • "I am a fan — you knew this was coming —

And this just in. "I'm not sure how columnists like you who write for a living get paid." KP: Usually by direct deposit.

Otherwise, my response to all of the above: So whaddya want for a buck?

A few days ago, a letter arrived asking me whether I ever considered that I might be wrong? My one-word response: "Constantly."

Which is true, up to a point. A columnist couldn't write if she thought she were wrong, right? But oftentimes we write to find out what we think, and sometimes we surprise ourselves. Many times I wish I thought otherwise, since life would be so much easier, but then we'd be bored.

Sometimes, ves. I even change my mind. When you've written columns as long as I have (26 or 27 years, I can't remember), you'd best change your mind or admit that you never trouble yourself with thinking. Certitude is a mask one dons only for deadlines, after which, feet on desk, one ruminates on the source of such certitude. This, of course, leads to crippling selfdoubt, which in turn may lead to drinking or,

For my own edification, a few words about the differences between online writing and newspaper writing. Like the difference between the male and female sexual appetites (just to keep you interested), one is a microwave, the other a crockpot. Online writers zip and zap across the

digital realm in real time, sometimes accelerating before news breaks. Newspaper writers, especially columnists, tend to simmer.

You'll notice at this point that columnists

tend to digress. They also generalize because, we must. It's our nature. We don't care that some females have appetites equal to males. If three is a trend, "most" is enough to generalize. Plus, we are easily bored (note the constant imperative to not be bored), and nothing is more tedious than punctiliousness. On the other hand, using a word like punctiliousness can make one want to smoke

a cigarette afterward. Back to the matter of differences. Because of print deadlines, I typically write two to three days before a column appears in print. Thus, I have to consider on Thursday what might still be of interest by Sunday. Though one

is, therefore, always late to the game, I can think of few commentaries that don't benefit from a few days' simmer.

Another difference has to do with standards. Newspaper tradition requires that we heed the "family" rule: What is appropriate for family consumption, especially on Sunday mornings? This mandate was born (ages ago) of the desire never to offend anyone, which can make for some rather arid reading and writing that doesn't swell one's breast. One must be clever enough to select words that sneak past the kiddies, who, having wearied of FaceTime twerking, might accidentally trip over a grown-up thought.

Another frequent reader comment: "Nice job, but you failed to mention," or "You left out.

KP: Yes, but ... columnists are strictly held to a non-negotiable word count — in my case, 750 and not a definite article more. My definition of a column, soon to be a book title, is: "A Sliver of a Slice of a Piece of a Moment." It is a glimpse of an insight viewed through the prism of another's tenure on Earth, served with trepidation and selfflagellating humility.

This is to say, thanks for the memories, the corrected syntax and the astute observations about my laxity and bombast, and special gratitude to those (you know who you are) who shared often-brilliant insights through their own tenured prism.

I couÎdn't do it without you.

Kathleen Parker's email address is kathleenparker@washpost.com.

Two Worthy Wishes For 2014

BY JOHN M. CRISP

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I've never been a big fan of New Year's resolutions. They often have the feel of death-bed conversions, of passionate commitments to do the right thing after most of the pleasures and benefits of doing the wrong thing have run their course.

Shame and a hangover on New Year's Day might provoke us to vow, without much chance of success, to never drink again. Still, who knows when we might commit to a new and better course that could improve our lives?

Accordingly, a couple of years ago, in the spirit of the season and with hope for the New Year, I presumed to propose three more or less unrelated national resolutions. Two are still worthy goals, at least in my opinion, but we haven't made much progress toward them.

First, I proposed that our country resolve to make 2012 the year in which we finally begin to take climate change more seriously. Two years later, our denial has shaded into resignation: we know that significant climate change is happening, but, for the most part, we try not to think about it.

I also proposed the quixotic notion that our nation resolve to save the post office. I like the idea that the U.S. Postal Service is an essentially democratizing influence, a public entity that ties every citizen to every other and, in line with its original intention, still draws the nation together. Everyone who has an address is included and gets the same service, and the 1 percent pay the same as the 99 percent. Well, we all have to have our dreams.

Finally, I proposed that our nation resolve to learn something good from a bad war. In mid-December 2011, President Obama welcomed home the last American combat troops from Iraq. After nine years of war, Obama said, with stunning understatement, "Iraq is not a perfect place." But at least, he added, "we are leaving a sovereign, stable and self-reliant country with a representative government elected by its people.

Of course, part of the president's job is to cast our nation's actions in the best possible

light, but even two years ago this hopeful estimation of Iraq was unduly optimistic. On Christmas Day, the New York Times reported that the United States is currently rushing Hellfire missiles and surveillance drones to Iraq to help suppress the highest level of violence since 2008, the result of al-Qaida-backed insurgency against an exclusionary Shia-dominated government. More than 8,000 Iraqis have died this year from the vi-

In short, Iraq is a mess. But it would be a disservice to our troops who served there if, amid the rest of the chaos in the Middle East, we casually forget that this unnecessary war arose from the ignorance, arrogance and incompetence of the Bush administration.

At this point, though, there's not much to be gained from continuing to blame George W. Bush for the disaster in Iraq, except to the extent that doing so reminds us not to keep believing that we can accomplish very much in that dangerous region by bombing more Muslims.

Which leads to a fine New Year's resolution for 2014: Let's find a way to make peace with

The current Geneva agreement with Iran is a rare opportunity. Both sides gave a little and received a little; uranium enrichment is slowed and sanctions are eased. This opportunity for rapprochement mustn't be allowed to slip away.

Unfortunately, radicals on both sides, motivated by fear or pride, threaten the moderation needed to make the agreement work.

But in many ways we have more in common with Iran than with Saudi Arabia or China. Many young Iranians are inclined toward modernism and secularism. More contact with the West would have the positive effect of urging them away from the radicalism that currently dominates Iran's government.

 $Successful\ re-engagement\ with\ Iran\ would\ be$ an excellent goal for 2014. Let's make it happen. Happy New Year!

John M. Crisp teaches in the English Department at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas. Readers may send him email at jcrisp@delmar.edu.

YOUR LETTERS

Homophobia In America

Alex Fields, Gayville

The nature of homophobia in America is quite common, and with the recent comments made by Phil Robertson, star of A&E's hit show "Duck Dynasty," is it time that we as a country look at why we are so homophobic?

Well, I believe that the answer is not letting comments, such as the one that Mr. Robertson made, get away without punishment. I applaud A&E for reprimanding Robertson and taking ac-

I am all for freedom of speech, and I know that Phil Robertson had every right to say what he felt, but it is infringing on other citizens' lives. It is belittling other people's life choices — and if this is actually the land of the free, we need to protect the minority's rights as well as the majority's.

Let this be a lesson to everyone. Phil Robertson did nothing wrong; he merely spoke his mind — but your ideas can get you in trouble.