

The Press & Dakotan

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OPINION OTHER VIEWS

Going It Alone On Guantanamo

BLOOMBERG VIEW: In his final news conference of 2015, President Barack Obama pledged to close the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. If that sounds familiar, it's because he made the same promise on his second full day in office.

If Obama hopes to accomplish this goal, he will almost certainly have to act alone. This would be a constitutionally risky attempt to infringe on congressional prerogatives, and it would bring a dangerous group of extremists to the U.S. over the objections of local residents. But it's the right thing to do.

The moral argument in favor of closing the camp remains overwhelming. While waterboarding and other "enhanced interrogation techniques" are a thing of the past, they remain a blot on America's reputation. Islamic State's practice of forcing its execution victims to wear orange jumpsuits is a reminder that Gitmo's very existence still provides fodder for the jihadi propaganda machine.

There are more practical concerns. By Pentagon accounting, taxpayers spend nearly \$3 million per year for each detainee, versus more than \$70,000 for each inmate at a federal maximum-security prison. Yes, building a new facility on the mainland would be expensive. But it would save money over time in detaining the 60 or so prisoners deemed too dangerous to release.

Diplomatically, there's no denying that having the controversial camp on a patch of the island has given the Castro regime a moral cudgel to use against U.S. efforts to encourage democracy and human rights. And legally, ever since the Supreme Court ruled seven years ago that the detainees in Cuba are entitled to habeas corpus protections, it has been difficult to argue that moving them to U.S. soil would give them undue legal advantages.

In using the power of the purse to keep the administration from transferring the detainees to a domestic site, Congress has put politics over common sense. Obama said last week he would offer a compromise solution, which he has long promised to John McCain, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a proponent of shuttering the facility. But that's political theater: Lawmakers remain determined to keep it open.

Fortunately, closing Gitmo is well within Obama's constitutional authority as commander in chief. The first priority is stepping up the release of the 30 or so other detainees who have been cleared as no longer posing a threat to U.S. security. Many are Yemeni nationals and cannot be returned to a failed country in the midst of civil war, but surely a small portion of the Pentagon's \$600 billion budget can be used to encourage willing takers.

As for the 60 "worst of the worst," the journey to the U.S. will likely be their last. While the military tribunals have been anything but efficient, they remain the proper legal route for detainees who cannot be charged in civilian courts. For those the military cannot charge at all, indefinite detention is the most viable option for combatants captured on the battlefield of an ongoing war.

The administration has discussed a handful of sites as appropriate for the new facility, including military bases in Kansas and South Carolina, and the federal supermax prison in Colorado. The local political backlash will be substantial — but if Washington can bribe Estonia and Palau to take in freed detainees, then surely it can reach an accommodation with a U.S. state over those still behind bars.

Most Americans know that Obama promised to close the Guantanamo facility. Fewer are probably aware that George W. Bush, whose administration opened it, now wants it closed, too. If Congress won't also change its mind, the president has no choice but to act on his own.

OUR LETTER POLICY

The **PRESS & DAKOTAN** invites its readers to write letters to the editor. We ask that a few simple guidelines be followed:

- Please limit letters to 300 words or less. Letters should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind.
- In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the **PRESS & DAKOTAN** will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses.
- Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.
- Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail to: Letters, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078, drop off at 319 Walnut in Yankton, fax to 665-1721 or email us at kelly.hertz@yankton.net.

IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, Dec. 24, the 358th day of 2015. 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, Colorado, found itself fielding phone calls from children wanting to know the whereabouts of Santa Claus after a newspaper ad mistakenly gave the Center's number; the result was a tradition continued by the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) of tracking Santa's location the night before Christmas.

On this date: In 1814, the United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the War of 1812 following ratification by both the British Parliament and the U.S. Senate.

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, Tennessee, that was the original version of the Ku Klux Klan.

In 1871, Giuseppe Verdi's opera "Aida" had its world premiere in Cairo, Egypt.

In 1914, during World War I, impromptu Christmas truces began to take hold along parts of the Western Front between British and German soldiers.

In 1939, Pope Pius XII delivered a Christmas Eve address in which he offered a five-point program for peace and denounced "premeditated aggressions."

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe as part of Operation Overlord.

In 1968, the Apollo 8 astronauts, orbiting the moon, read passages from the Old Testament Book of Genesis during a Christmas Eve telecast.

In 1974, Cyclone Tracy began battering the Australian city of Darwin, resulting in widespread damage and causing some 65 deaths.

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 1990, actor Tom Cruise married his "Days of Thunder" co-star, Nicole Kidman, during a private ceremony at a Colorado ski resort (the marriage ended in 2001).

In 1995, fire broke out at the Philadelphia Zoo, killing 23 rare gorillas, orangutans, gibbons and lemurs.

Ten years ago: Iraq's governing Shiite coalition called on Iraqis to accept results showing the religious bloc led in parliamentary elections and moved ahead with efforts to form a "national unity" government.

Michael Vale, the actor best known for portraying sleepy-eyed Fred the Baker in Dunkin' Donuts commercials, died in New York at age 83.

Five years ago: Pope Benedict XVI ushered in Christmas Eve with an evening Mass amid heightened security concerns following package bombings at two Rome embassies and Christmas Eve security breaches at the Vatican the previous two years. John Warhola, the older brother who helped raise pop art icon Andy Warhol and later helped establish the Andy Warhol Museum, died in Pittsburgh at age 85.

One year ago: Sony Pictures broadly released "The Interview" online — an unprecedented counterstroke against the hackers who'd spoiled the Christmas opening of the comedy depicting the assassination of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. A Jordanian pilot, Lt. Mu'ath al-Kaseasbeh, was captured by the Islamic State group after his warplane crashed in Syria; he was later killed. TCU's Gary Patterson was named The Associated Press college football coach of the year.

Western Kentucky held on to defeat Central Michigan 49-48 in a wild inaugural Bahamas Bowl.

Today's Birthdays: Songwriter-bandleader Dave Bartholomew is 97. Author Mary Higgins Clark is 88. Federal health official Anthony S. Fauci, M.D., is 75. Recording company executive Mike Curb is 71. Rock singer-musician Lemmy (Motorhead) is 70. Actress Sharon Farrell is 69. Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., is 69. Actor Grand L. Bush is 60. Actor Clarence Gilyard is 60. Actress Stephanie Hodge is 59. The former president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai is 58. Rock musician Ian Burden (The Human League) is 58. Actor Anil Kapoor is 56. Actor Wade Williams is 54. Designer Kate Spade is 53. Rock singer Mary Ramsey (10,000 Maniacs) is 52. Actor Mark Valley is 51. Actor Die-drich Bader is 49. Actor Amaury Nolasco is 45. Singer Ricky Martin is 44. Author Stephanie Meyer is 42. "American Idol" host Ryan Seacrest is 41. Actor Michael Raymond-James is 38. Rock singer Louis Tomlinson (One Direction) is 24.

Thought for Today: "Christmas comes, but once a year is enough." — American proverb.

FROM THE BIBLE

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. John 1:14. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.



'Yes, Virginia, There Is A Santa Claus'

IN ANGRY TIMES, EVEN the magic of a simple belief can be tested.

So it feels in days when fear replaces hope as vision and skepticism seems to swallow any spark of trust and faith.

Maybe today, then, we can more fully appreciate a correspondence that took place in 1897 when a small girl asked a big-city newspaper a plain question: "Is there a Santa Claus?"

It was a difficult question in a difficult age, when industrialization was reshaping lives and, in some places, crushing souls. There was a new, cold modernity in the air as the 19th century neared its end. The world was changing in bold ways, and we were changing with it.

From somewhere in this fabric, the questioned was asked.

You know the story: how 8-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon, at the suggestion of her father, sent her question to the *New York Sun* newspaper because "if you see it in the *Sun*, it's so." The letter was assigned to Frank P. Church, was an unlikely deliverer of such news. He was a war correspondent during the Civil War and was reportedly known for his biting, sardonic style. Nevertheless, he crafted a thoughtful and reassuring answer, published on Sept. 21, 1897, that defied its age and became timeless and wondrous, an essential part of the Christmas canon.

Public response to the exchange was overwhelming. *The Sun* reprinted the letter and reply every Christmas until the newspaper closed its doors in 1949. The phrase, "Yes Virginia, there is a Santa Claus," has become a staple of the holiday season, recognizable anywhere the Christmas spirit is kept. Church's identity as its author remained a secret until after his death in 1906.

His reply is the most reprinted editorial in newspaper history. Today, the *Press & Dakotan*, in keeping with its Christmas Eve tradition, reprints O'Hanlon's letter and Church's response for your holiday consideration ...

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.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Taking The Pledge

Mark Winegar, Vermillion

When I go to a USD basketball game, we will the flag and take the Pledge of Allegiance once again. But how many of us think about what it means?

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all."

We'll pledge to our nation, which is the people: the elderly woman who needs a ride,

the teenager who serves your popcorn and her teachers, and the homeless veteran living under the bridge on old Highway 50. We are all the people and our diversity makes us strong.

We'll pledge liberty and justice to one another. We are all free to worship as we choose whether we are Christian, Jew, Muslim or non-religious. We are free to live our lives within the laws of the land regardless of national origin, race, gender, sexual-preference, or political party.

We all have a story and an opportunity to learn from one another.

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