

The Press & Dakotan

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OPINION

A Question Of Dubious Timing

Sometimes, the problem with a piece of legislation is not so much the content but the timing. This can succinctly describe South Dakota House Bill 1176, widely known as the "Daschle bill." The aim of this bill is to repeal a law that the Republican-dominated Legislature passed in 2002 to throw a monkey wrench into the political calculations of then-Sen. Tom Daschle. At the time, the South Dakota Democrat and Senate majority leader was rumored to be interested in a presidential run in 2004, which also happened to be the year he was next up for re-election to the U.S. Senate. So, the GOP pushed through a bill declaring that an individual could not do both — which is why it's called the "Daschle bill." As it turned out, Daschle didn't run for president. He ran for re-election and lost to John Thune. Now, Thune is rumored to be considering a presidential run in 2016, which also happens to be when he is up for re-election. And suddenly, the "Daschle bill" is a bad idea, so much so that it needs repealing.

In fact, House GOP leader Brian Gosch of Rapid City even apologized for the 2002 legislation, calling it "bad legislation." He said that on the House floor just before the largely Republican body overwhelmingly approved HB1176. The vote was 50-17, with all the "yes" votes being Republican. Six Republicans voted with 11 Democrats to oppose the change.

The thing is, whether or not the rule that was passed in 2002 — for whatever reason — was a good idea or a bad idea would actually make for an interesting discussion in a political vacuum. Both sides of the argument have their justifications and drawbacks. And frankly, we could live with either one in place.

But HB1176 isn't about that discussion, and it surely isn't being considered in a political vacuum.

The timing is blatantly obvious and brazenly political. "That's smarmy to me. I'll vote for this in 2017," stated Rep. Steve Hickey, a Republican from Sioux Falls who voted against HB1176. "This is a tactics deal ... I see ruthlessness in this bill."

In a way, whether or not the measure should pass in the Senate and become law is almost a moot point.

Laws aren't designed to be tinkered with to fit the political whims or agendas of a particular moment or election cycle. That's precisely what laws aren't supposed to do.

And it's the kind of thing our lawmakers shouldn't be engaging in at any time.

Unfortunately, the fact that they do is no surprise at all. Perhaps someone in Pierre should be apologizing for that, too.

kmh

ABOUT THIS PAGE

The View 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 on current topics. Questions regarding the Views page should be directed to Kelly Hertz at kelly.hertz@yankton.net/.

P&D 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 Wednesday, Feb. 11, the 42nd day of 2015. There are 323 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Feb. 11, 1945, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Josef Stalin signed the Yalta Agreement, in which Stalin agreed to declare war against Imperial Japan following Nazi Germany's capitulation (in return, the Soviet Union would acquire territories lost to Japan in the Russo-Japanese War).

On this date: In 1812, Massachusetts Gov. Elbridge Gerry signed a redistricting law favoring his Democratic-Republican Party — giving rise to the term "gerrymandering."

In 1858, a French girl, Bernadette Soubirous, reported the first of 18 visions of a lady dressed in white in a grotto near Lourdes. (The Catholic Church later accepted that the visions were of the Virgin Mary.)

In 1862, the Civil War Battle of Fort Donelson began in Tennessee. (Union forces led by Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant captured the fort five days later.)

In 1929, the Lateran Treaty was signed, with Italy recognizing the independence and sovereignty of Vatican City.

In 1937, a six-week-old sit-down strike against General Motors ended, with the company agreeing to recognize the United Automobile Workers Union.

In 1963, American author and poet Sylvia Plath was found dead in her London flat, a suicide; she was 30.

In 1972, McGraw-Hill Publishing Co. and Life magazine canceled plans to publish what had turned out to be a fake autobiography of reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes.

In 1975, Margaret Thatcher was elected leader of Britain's opposition Conservative Party.

In 1989, Rev. Barbara C. Harris became the first woman consecrated as a bishop in the Episcopal Church, in a ceremony held in Boston.

In 1990, South African black activist Nelson Mandela was freed after 27 years in captivity.

In 2012, pop singer Whitney Houston, 48, was found dead in a hotel room in Beverly Hills, California.

In 2013, Pope Benedict XVI announced his resignation during a routine morning meeting of Vatican cardinals. (The 85-year-old pontiff was succeeded by Pope Francis.)

Ten years ago: Defense Secretary

Donald H. Rumsfeld made an unannounced visit to Iraq, where he observed Iraqi security forces and declared "there's no question progress has been made" in preparing the nation for building a new government. CNN chief news executive Eason Jordan quit amid a furor over remarks he'd made about journalists being targeted by the U.S. military in Iraq. Samuel W. Alderson, inventor of crash test dummies, died in Marina Del Rey, California, at age 90.

Five years ago: Former President Bill Clinton had two stents inserted in one of his heart arteries after being hospitalized in New York with chest pains. Iranian security forces unleashed a crushing sweep against opposition protesters as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad used the 31st anniversary of the Islamic revolution to defy the West. British fashion designer Alexander McQueen, 40, was found dead in his London home.

One year ago: President Barack Obama, during a joint White House news conference with French President Francois Hollande, vowed to come down like "a ton of bricks" on businesses that violated Iranian sanctions while nuclear negotiations were underway, and conceded "enormous frustration" with stalled Syrian peace talks. At the Sochi Games, Carina Vogt of Germany won women's ski jumping's first-ever Olympic gold medal.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Conrad Janis is 87. Fashion designer Mary Quant is 81. Actor Burt Reynolds is 79. Actress Tina Louise is 77. Actor Sonny Landham is 74. Bandleader Sergio Mendes is 74. Rhythm-and-blues singer Otis Clay is 73. Actor Philip Anglim is 63. Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush is 62. Actress Catherine Hickland is 59. Rock musician David Uosikkinen (The Hooters) is 59. Actress Carey Lowell is 54. Singer Sheryl Crow is 53. Former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin is 51. Actress Jennifer Aniston is 46. Actor Damian Lewis is 44. Actress Marisa Petroni is 43. Singer D'Angelo is 41. Actor Brice Beckham is 39. Rock M-C/vocalist Mike Shinoda (Linkin Park) is 38. Singer-actress Brandi is 36. Country musician Jon Jones (The Eli Young Band) is 35. Actor Matthew Lawrence is 35. Rhythm-and-blues singer Kelly Rowland is 34. Singer Aubrey O'Day is 31. Actress Q'orianka Kilcher is 25. Actor Taylor Lautner is 23.

Thought for Today: "Life does not count by years. Some suffer a lifetime in a day, and so grow old between the rising and the setting of the sun." — Augusta Jane Evans, American novelist (1835-1909).

FROM THE BIBLE

The day of death (is better) than the day of birth. Ecclesiastes 7:1. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.



MESSAGE TO UKRAINE

Robert Reich

On The Job? Back To The 19th Century

BY ROBERT B. REICH
Tribune Content Agency

My recent column about the growth of on-demand jobs like Uber making life less predictable and secure for workers unleashed a small barrage of criticism from people who contend that workers get what they're worth in the market.

A *Forbes Magazine* contributor, for example, writes that jobs exist only "when both employer and employee are happy with the deal being made." So if the new jobs are low-paying and irregular, too bad.

Much the same argument was voiced in the late 19th century over alleged "freedom of contract." Any deal between employees and workers was assumed to be fine if both sides voluntarily agreed to it.

It was an era when many workers were "happy" to toil 12-hour days in sweatshops for lack of any better alternative. It was also a time of great wealth for a few and squalor for many. And of corruption, as the lackeys of robber barons deposited sacks of cash on the desks of pliant legislators.

Finally, after decades of labor strife and political tumult, the 20th century brought an understanding that capitalism requires minimum standards of decency and fairness — workplace safety, a minimum wage, maximum hours (with time-and-a-half for overtime) and a ban on child labor.

We also learned that capitalism needs a balance of power between big corporations and workers.

We achieved that through antitrust laws that reduced the capacity of giant corporations to impose their will, and labor laws that allowed workers to organize and bargain collectively.

By the 1950s, when 35 percent of private-sector workers belonged to a labor union, they were able to negotiate higher wages and better working conditions than employers would otherwise have been "happy" to provide.

But now we seem to be heading back to 19th century.

Corporations are shifting full-time work onto temps, freelancers and contract workers who fall outside the labor protections established decades ago.

The nation's biggest corporations and Wall Street banks are larger and more potent than ever.

And labor union membership has shrunk to less than 7 percent of the private-sector workforce.

So it's not surprising we're once again hearing that workers are worth no more than what

they can get in the market.

But as we should have learned a century ago, markets don't exist in nature. They're created by human beings. The real question is how they're organized and for whose benefit.

In the late 19th century, they were organized for the benefit of a few at the top. But by the middle of the 20th century they were organized for the vast majority.

During the 30 years after the end of World War II, as the economy doubled in size, so did the wages of most Americans — along with improved hours and working conditions.

Yet since around 1980, even though the economy has doubled once again (the Great Recession notwithstanding), the wages of most Americans have stagnated. And their benefits and working conditions have deteriorated.

This isn't because most Americans are worth less. In fact, worker productivity is higher than ever.

It's because big corporations, Wall Street and some enormously rich individuals have gained political power to organize the market in ways that have enhanced their wealth while leaving most Americans behind.

That includes trade agreements protecting the intellectual property of large corporations and Wall Street's financial assets, but not American jobs and wages.

Bankruptcies of big Wall Street banks and their executives and shareholders when they can't pay what they owe, but not homeowners who can't meet their mortgage payments.

Bankruptcy protection for big corporations, allowing them to shed their debts, including labor contracts. But no bankruptcy protection for college graduates overburdened with student debts.

Antitrust leniency toward a vast swath of American industry — including Big Cable (Comcast, AT&T, Time Warner), Big Tech (Amazon, Google), Big Pharma, the largest Wall Street banks and giant retailers (Walmart).

But less tolerance toward labor unions — as workers trying to form unions are fired with impunity, and more states adopt so-called "right-to-work" laws that undermine unions.

We seem to be heading full speed back to the late 19th century.

So what will be the galvanizing force for change this time?

Robert Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley and Senior Fellow at the Blum Center for Developing Economies. His new film, "Inequality for All," is now out on iTunes, DVD and On Demand.



Robert B. REICH

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A Helping Hand!

Ruth Ann Dickman, Utica

I want to thank the Good Samaritan who cleaned out my driveway after this last snowstorm. I don't get around very well anymore due to my car being totaled after being hit by a big Suburban, then I fell and broke my hip, had

a back sprain and this last summer, my car was hit in the back while I was stopped.

I am so grateful to anyone who helps me, and I have had a lot of help from strangers, so I know that there are good people around! I'm not sure who the Good Samaritan was but they have a good heart!

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