

STAR TRIBUNE/CAGLE CARTOONS



# A Fast, Unfortunate Start

BY KELLY HERTZ

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Perhaps the only thing I like about the New Year's holiday is the "clean slate" feeling I get, coupled with a delusional hope that the change in years will introduce some fresh change to our weary world. The intrigue in all this comes in seeing just how deep into the year I can go before this stupid hope is swept away by reality.

For 2013, Congress wasted utterly no time at all in breaking out the brooms, thanks to its New Year's theatrics concerning the fiscal cliff. As a result, my optimism turned into an aggravating conclusion that the biggest threat facing the U.S. economy today is the group of lawmakers we've chosen to oversee it.

The fiscal cliff debacle was a self-inflicted wound that had very little basis in necessity. I'll forego the details of the deal that was struck in the Senate early Tuesday and then, after numerous twists, finally approved by the House that night. It's complicated, no one is really happy with the outcome and, worst of all, we're almost certainly going to go through this again in a couple of months when a looming battle over debt ceiling will once more stampe­de us to the brink.

Instead, let's talk about the players in this mess. This fiscal cliff was not caused by them, but was instead set up FOR them. It was established in the summer of 2011 as a deadline for dealing with the federal debt ceiling. It was hoped that this deadline, which threatened a combination of harsh budget cuts and tax increases, would force the disparate political factions to come together and produce a common goal and focus for the greater good. There was no outside economic force, no planetary alignment, no apocalyptic hammer that was creating the need for this thing — this *artificial* thing — at this moment.

But lawmakers unskillfully turned the exercise into just such a scenario. "We created a monster," admitted Rep. Charlie Rangel on the House floor on New Year's Day — after the manu-



Kelly  
**HERTZ**

factured deadline had passed and the very real consequences were ready to set in — during a debate over the Senate proposal.

Norm Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute told Reuters that the entire fiscal cliff episode was an "immense embarrassment."

In the broader scheme, this kind of incident — as well as the other spitting matches we've been having on practically every political matter imaginable — is arguably more of a threat to this country than the debt we are incurring.

The debt is a serious matter, to be sure, but do not operate under the delusion that America is broke, because we aren't. We are still the richest nation and the most important economic driver on the planet.

But right now, we as a nation look hopelessly incompetent.

This latest episode of ineptitude has been "very bad for the economy and for our image in the world," stated Alice Rivlin, an economic analyst. "We don't look like a country in charge of its own destiny."

And that is infuriating.

Many economic experts believe things are going to be even uglier when the debt ceiling deadline nears in a few weeks. Post-cliff, some lawmakers are already growling about the next fight and the new leveraging that will be done on the debt ceiling. Ornstein surveyed the entrenchment, particularly among some House Republicans who nearly scuttled the deal Tuesday, and called the prospects for the next deadline "actually frightening."

We can always hope that these experts are wrong and that cooler heads and better angels will prevail. However, my hope for this year and for our politics in general took a serious hit on Tuesday. Why I expected something other than what transpired escapes me now. That rank partisanship WAS the motivation for the deadline, after all. And it never takes a holiday.

You can follow Kelly Hertz on Twitter at [twitter.com/kelly\\_hertz](https://twitter.com/kelly_hertz)

# Fiscal Cliff: Waiting For The Sequel

BY MICHAEL REAGAN

[CagleCartoons.com](http://CagleCartoons.com)

The latest horror movie from Washington — "The Fiscal Cliff" — finally came to an exciting end in the early hours of 2013.

But after two years did its climax — more taxes, more spending and more chicken-livered can-kicking by our politicians — really shock any of you over the age of 6?

Didn't think so. Spinning the budget deal as a last-minute victory for the American people, the White House and Congress are saying that all the actors knuckled down, did the right thing and created a compromise budget deal that kept the country from going over the fiscal cliff.

Bull. As usual. The Washington In-Crowd didn't save the country from going over the fiscal cliff, which of course they created in the first place. They just shoved the edge of the cliff a couple of months down the road.

After two years of arguing over taxes, the federal debt, government spending and how to fix the ticking fiscal time bombs of Social Security and Medicare, the professional politicians solved nothing.

They merely did the easy, politically painless stuff. They raised tax rates from 35 percent to 39.6 on the so-called rich who make more than \$400,000 individually or \$450,000 as a couple. They extended unemployment benefits for a year.

They extended the Bush-era tax cuts and made them permanent, something even President Obama secretly favored because he knows that ending them would throw the economy into another recession.

But the Washington In-Crowd failed the American people yet again. They didn't reduce the deficit by a single dollar. They didn't create a single job. They didn't cut or cap federal spending. They did nothing about Social Security or Medicare.

The revenues they'll bring into federal coffers with their higher taxes on the rich will be spent by the end of the week. They were so busy doing the easy stuff they never even got around to passing a bill to help



Michael  
**REAGAN**

the victims of Hurricane Sandy.

Meanwhile, while everyone was watching the chessboard to see how high taxes were going to be jacked up on the rich and successful, Congress shafted the middle class and the working poor by voting to let President Obama's two-year-old, 2 percent payroll-tax cut expire.

The Obamamedia won't be making a big deal out of it, of course, but nearly everyone who earns a paycheck was given a tax hike. According to the Tax Policy Center, about 77 percent of households making between \$50,000 and \$200,000 will be paying higher FICA taxes in 2013.

On average, starting this week, about \$1,600 of an individual's income will again be taken from his or her paycheck annually and sent directly to the bankrupt coffers of Social Security.

President Obama and the advocates of Bigger Government were the winners in our latest fiscal melodrama. Obama set the agenda and he got what he wanted. Republicans who wanted real spending cuts or some semblance of fiscal responsibility got rolled.

In two months, it'll be time for Congress to vote on raising the federal debt ceiling. We'll hear the same arguments and scare stories from the White House and the media about what will happen if we don't allow the Washington In-Crowd to borrow a few more trillion dollars to keep their borrowing-and-spending racket going.

America will find itself being forced to watch another Washington horror flick. And unless voters wake up and the GOP gets its act together, "Fiscal Cliff, Part 2" is going to have the same unhappy ending for conservatives as the original.

Michael Reagan is the son of President Ronald Reagan, a political consultant, and the author of "The New Reagan Revolution" (St. Martin's Press). He is the founder and chairman of The Reagan Group and president of The Reagan Legacy Foundation. Visit his websites at [www.reagan.com](http://www.reagan.com) and [www.michaelereagan.com](http://www.michaelereagan.com). Send comments to [Reagan@caglecartoons.com](mailto:Reagan@caglecartoons.com). Follow @reaganworld on Twitter.

Great Plains states including South Dakota. Without a PTC extension, our state's contribution to American energy independence will be weakened.

Thank you to Sen Thune and Rep. Noem, in particular, for their work to support the Production Tax Credit. South Dakota, job creation, and energy independence will all benefit if they are successful in extending this important federal provision.

# THE PRESS & DAKOTAN

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## OPINION | WE SAY

### Citizens Of The Year



**THUMBS UP** to Yankton's 2012 Citizens of the Year, Dr. Brooks and Vi Ranney. The announcement was made Wednesday. They have been fixtures in Yankton life for years. Brooks came to Yankton in the 1940s and was a pioneer in area women's health care. Vi is a longtime resident and has been active in areas ranging from the March of Dimes to the local theater group and concert association. Together they have also organized tours that have traveled the world many times over. Congratulations to them both. A reception for the Ranneys will be announced soon.

### A Safe Start



**THUMBS UP** to Yankton County residents for starting off the New Year safely. Only one drunk driving arrest was made between Monday and Tuesday. Also, no serious accidents were reported. We know plenty of people were out celebrating New Year's Eve, so these statistics show us that local citizens made smart decisions about how they would bring in 2013. That is to be commended. Let's hope that we keep making good decisions throughout the new year.

### On The Hunt



**THUMBS UP** to the first — and by all accounts, successful — East River bobcat hunting season. Nearly three dozen cats were caught during the 22-day season in the designated Buffalo, Brule, Charles Mix, Bon Homme and Yankton counties. Hunters said they were excited about the new season, and testing on the cats' carcasses should provide valuable data about the area bobcat population, according to Conservation Officer Sam Schelhaas of Yankton County. With the initial success, the Game, Fish and Parks Commission may look at continuing the experimental season in future years.

### No Progress



**THUMBS DOWN** to the apparent lack of concern for the federal farm bill, including dairy programs that heavily affect milk prices. We realize Congress has been heavily urbanized for years, but agriculture won attention for providing a reliable, relatively cheap food supply as well as containing nutrition and food stamp programs. Even most urban districts contain large pockets of commodity growers. We've heard of biting the hand that feeds you, but is this a case of ignoring it?

### How Much Snow?



**THUMBS DOWN** to the news that, according to climatologists, it would take at least 8 feet of snow — and likely much more — to revive soil to its pre-drought condition for spring planting. Parts of the Midwest have received 15 inches of snow in recent weeks, but a foot of snow only equals about an inch of water, depending on its density. The figure pales next to the 20-inch deficit in parts of the region. The recent climatologists' report brings concern not only for farmers and ranchers but also firefighters, municipalities and electric utilities.

## 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 John Thune will run for president in 2016?**  
No .....68%  
Yes .....27%  
Undecided .....5%  
**TOTAL VOTES CAST** .....453  
*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:

**Who do you support in a possible U.S. Senate race between Tim Johnson and Mike Rounds?**

To vote in the *Press & Dakotan's* Internet poll, log on to our website at [www.yankton.net](http://www.yankton.net).

## TODAY IN HISTORY

### By The Associated Press

Today is Friday, Jan. 4, the fourth day of 2013. There are 361 days left in the year.

**Today's Highlight in History:** On Jan. 4, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson delivered his State of the Union address in which he outlined the goals of his "Great Society," a series of domestic policy initiatives aimed at growing the economy and improving the quality of life for all.

**On this date:** In 1821, the first native-born American saint, Elizabeth Ann Seton, died in Emmitsburg, Md.

In 1904, the Supreme Court, in *Gonzalez v. Williams*, ruled that Puerto Ricans were not aliens and could enter the United States freely; however, the court stopped short of declaring them U.S. citizens.

In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his State of the Union address, called for legislation to provide assistance for the jobless, elderly, impoverished children and the handicapped.

In 1943, Soviet dictator Josef Stalin appeared on the cover of *Time* as the magazine's 1942 "Man of the Year."

In 1951, during the Korean War, North Korean and Communist Chinese forces recaptured the city of Seoul.

In 1960, author and philosopher Albert Camus died in an automobile accident in Villeblevin, France, at age 46.

In 1964, Pope Paul VI began a visit to the Holy Land, the first papal pilgrimage of its kind, as he arrived in Jerusalem.

In 1974, President Richard M. Nixon refused to hand over tape recordings and documents subpoenaed by the Senate Watergate Committee.

In 1987, 16 people were killed when an Amtrak train bound from Washington, D.C., to Boston collided with Conrail locomotives that had crossed into its path from a side track in Chase, Md.

In 1990, Charles Stuart, who'd claimed he'd been wounded and that his pregnant wife was fatally shot by a robber, leapt to his death off a Boston bridge after he himself became a suspect.

In 2007, Nancy Pelosi was elected the first female speaker of the House as De-

mocrats took control of Congress.

**Ten years ago:** As President George W. Bush put the finishing touches on an economic growth package costing \$674 billion over 10 years, Democratic presidential hopefuls pledged to scuttle what they characterized as a plan that would help the wealthy without reviving the economy. Oscar-winning cinematographer Conrad L. Hall died in Santa Monica, Calif., at age 76.

**Five years ago:** The government reported that the nation's jobless rate hit 5 percent in Dec. 2007, a two-year high, fanning recession fears. Howling winds, pelting rain and heavy snow pummeled California. Britney Spears lost custody of her two sons to ex-husband Kevin Federline a day after police and paramedics were called to her home.

**One year ago:** Defying Republican lawmakers, President Barack Obama barreled past the Senate and used a recess appointment to name Richard Cordray the first director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

**Today's Birthdays:** Actress Barbara Rush is 86. Football Hall-of-Fame coach Don Shula is 83. Actress Dyan Cannon is 76. Opera singer Grace Bumbry is 76. Author-historian Doris Kearns Goodwin is 70. Country singer Kathy Forrester (The Forester Sisters) is 58. Actress Ann Magnuson is 57. Rock musician Bernard Sumner (New Order, Joy Division) is 57. Country singer Patty Loveless is 56. Rock singer Michael Stipe is 53. Actor Patrick Cassidy is 51. Actor Dave Foley is 50. Actress Dot Jones (TV: "Glee") is 49. Actor Rick Hearst is 48. Singer-musician Cait O'Riordan is 48. Actress Julia Ormond is 48. Tennis player Guy Forget is 48. Country singer Deana Carter is 47. Rock musician Benjamin Davill (Crash Test Dummies) is 46. Actor Jeremy Licht is 42. Actress-singer Jill Marie Jones is 38. All-country singer Justin Townes Earle is 31. Christian rock singer Spencer Chamberlain (Underoath) is 30. Comedian-actress Charlyne Yi is 27.

**Thought for Today:** "Sometimes history takes things into its own hands." — Thurgood Marshall, U.S. Supreme Court justice (1908-1993).

## FROM THE BIBLE

*Praise [the LORD] with trumpet sound; praise Him with lute and harp! Praise Him with tambourine and dance; praise Him with strings and pipe! Praise Him with sounding cymbals; praise Him with loud clashing cymbals! Psalm 150:3-5. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis*

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## YOUR LETTERS

### Extending Credit

Brad Fowler, Elk Point

South Dakota is fortunate to have a congressional delegation in full support of an extension of the Production Tax Credit (PTC). The PTC would have expired at the end of this year. It is the mechanism that has allowed for the development of wind energy facilities and related manufacturing operations in many