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Yankton Media, Inc., 319 Walnut St., Yankton, SD 57078

CONTACT US
PHONE:
(605) 665-7811
(800) 743-2968
NEWS FAX:
(605) 665-1721
ADVERTISING FAX:
(605) 665-0288
WEBSITE:
www.yankton.net

**SUBSCRIPTIONS/
CIRCULATION**
Extension 104
mike.hrycko@yankton.net
CLASSIFIED ADS
Extension 108
tera.schmidt@yankton.net
NEWS DEPT.
Extension 114
news@yankton.net
SPORTS DEPT.
Extension 106
sports@yankton.net
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sales@yankton.net
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ar@yankton.net
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Extension 136
beth.rye@yankton.net
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Extension 129
kathy.larson@yankton.net

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OPINION

Energy Policy: Look In The Mirror

The greatest strength in America's energy policy may be in the mirror. And sometimes, that mirror also harbors the policy's greatest weakness. In the past six months, global oil prices have collapsed, resulting in an epic freefall in gasoline prices that have gladdened motorists from coast to coast. It's easy to understand why, especially when the cost of filling up your vehicle has been nearly cut in half in recent months. But there was a bonus that came with higher fuel prices, beyond what it did for America's own oil industry. The pain we've felt at the pump for the last few decades — starting with the 1973 Arab oil embargo when OPEC became a dirty word — has compelled us to become a more energy-efficient nation. This practically reshaped the automotive industry, which has created more fuel-efficient vehicles for a market eager to save. It has also promoted the deployment of energy efficiencies in businesses, schools and other facilities. In short, Americans became energy conscious and, as a result, gradually reduced its petroleum consumption.

That's all good, of course, and it is an important step in truly reaching the cherished (and mostly fictional) nirvana of energy independence. The downside is what happens to us when the pain subsides. In this occasional situation where prices stabilize or even drop — in the current case, dramatically, as the \$1.839 seen at most Yankton stations Tuesday would attest — some of us tend to forget the lessons that were learned from high prices and revert to our old, less efficient ways. That may be what's happening now. The Associated Press reported earlier this week that car dealerships are retooling their inventory to put forth bigger, thirstier vehicles because consumers who once demanded superior fuel efficiency are now looking for the larger rides because gas prices aren't so painful these days. A pent-up demand is driving a change of thinking across the board.

However, this trend actually goes back as couple of years. According to the website Inside Climate News, U.S. oil consumption actually began ticking upward in 2013 — the first rise in several years — thanks to the increase in inexpensive domestic fuel. Indeed, the increase in domestic production has apparently made the market mostly immune to any instabilities in the Middle East that once regularly manipulated oil prices like a yo-yo. And it wasn't just motorists who turned the trend around, as industrial sources also increased their consumption of petroleum products. So, the behavior that made us more self-sufficient in the age of expensive oil has slipped into sleep mode now that prices are falling. We are buying big vehicles again, thinking nothing of fueling up at bargain prices. While the institutionalized efficiencies will continue to help, our old impulses probably won't in the short term.

History screams that we will certainly learn the lessons again, as these price spirals and spikes go in cycles. Make no mistake, we certainly love these low prices, which are a direct economic stimulus and seem to unshackle our urge to roam. But when the high prices return, we will rediscover the conservation sensibilities that ultimately make for a stronger national energy policy. Like it or not, that's the gain we get with our pain.

kmh

IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
Today is Wednesday, Jan. 21, the 21st day of 2015. There are 344 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Jan. 21, 1915, the first Kiwanis Club, dedicated to community service, was founded in Detroit.

On this date: In 1793, during the French Revolution, King Louis XVI, condemned for treason, was executed on the guillotine.

In 1861, Jefferson Davis of Mississippi and four other Southerners whose states had seceded from the Union resigned from the U.S. Senate.

In 1908, New York City's Board of Aldermen passed an ordinance prohibiting women from smoking in public establishments (the measure was vetoed by Mayor George B. McClellan Jr., but not before one woman, Katie Mulcahey, was jailed overnight for refusing to pay a fine).

In 1910, the Great Paris Flood began as the rain-swollen Seine River burst its banks, sending water into the French capital.

In 1924, Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin died at age 53.

In 1937, Count Basie and his band recorded "One O'Clock Jump" for Decca Records (on this date in 1942, they re-recorded the song for Okeh Records).

In 1954, the first atomic submarine, the USS Nautilus, was launched at Groton, Connecticut (however, the Nautilus did not make its first nuclear-powered run until nearly a year later).

In 1968, the Battle of Khe Sanh began during the Vietnam War. An American B-52 bomber carrying four hydrogen bombs crashed in Greenland, killing one crew member and scattering radioactive material.

In 1975, female reporters entered a National Hockey League locker room for post-game interviews for the first time. Robin Herman of The New York Times and Canadian radio reporter Marcel St. Cyr were allowed to talk to players following the NHL All-Star Game in Montreal in which the Wales Conference defeated the Campbell Conference 7-1.

In 1977, President Jimmy Carter pardoned almost all Vietnam War draft evaders.

In 1982, convict-turned-author Jack Henry Abbott was found guilty in New York of first-degree manslaughter in the stabbing death of waiter Richard Adan in 1981. (Abbott was later sentenced to 15 years to life in prison; he committed suicide in 2002.)

In 1994, a jury in Manassas, Virginia, found Lorena Bobbitt not guilty by reason of temporary insanity of maliciously wounding

her husband John, whom she'd accused of sexually assaulting her.

Ten years ago: A car bomb outside a Shiite mosque in Baghdad killed at least 14 people; a suicide bombing at a Shiite wedding south of the capital killed at least seven people. The body of Megan LeAnn Holden, a college student whose abduction was captured on a surveillance videotape as she was leaving her clerk's job at a Wal-Mart, was found in western Texas. (Johnny Lee Williams Jr. later pleaded guilty to capital murder and was sentenced to life in prison.)

Five years ago: A bitterly divided U.S. Supreme Court, in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, vastly increased the power of big business and labor unions to influence government decisions by freeing them to spend their millions directly to sway elections for president and Congress. Former Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards finally admitted fathering a daughter during an affair before his second White House bid. Toyota recalled 2.3 million U.S. vehicles to fix accelerator pedals.

One year ago: Former Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell, once viewed as a rising star in the GOP, and his wife, Maureen, were indicted on federal corruption charges; the couple denied wrongdoing. (A jury in Sept. 2014 convicted the McDonnells of doing favors for former Star Scientific CEO Janie Williams in exchange for more than \$165,000 in low-interest loans and gifts.)

Today's Birthdays: Actress Ann Wedgeworth is 81. World Golf Hall of Famer Jack Nicklaus is 75. Opera singer-conductor Placido Domingo is 74. Singer Mac Davis is 73. Actress Jill Eikenberry is 68. Country musician Jim Ibbotson (The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band) is 68. Singer-songwriter Billy Ocean is 65. Former U.S. Ambassador to China Gary Locke is 65. U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder is 64. Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen is 62. Actor-director Robby Benson is 59. Actress Geena Davis is 59. Basketball Hall of Famer Hakeem Olajuwon is 52. Actress Charlotte Ross is 47. Actor John Ducey is 46. Actress Karina Lombard is 46. Rapper Levitt (B-Rock and the Bizz) is 45. Rock musician Mark Trojanowski (Sister Hazel) is 45. Rock singer-songwriter Cat Power is 43. Rock DJ Chris Kilmore (Incubus) is 42. Actor Vincent Laresca is 41. Singer Emma Bunton (Spice Girls) is 39. Actor Jerry Trainor is 38. Country singer Phil Stacey is 37. Rhythm-and-blues singer Nokie (Dru Hill) is 36. Actress Izabella Miko is 34.

Thought for Today: "The road to ruin is always in good repair, and the travelers pay the expense of it." — Josh Billings (Henry Wheeler Shaw), American humorist (1818-1885).

FROM THE BIBLE

The Lord is not slow to !! His promise. 2 Peter 3:9. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

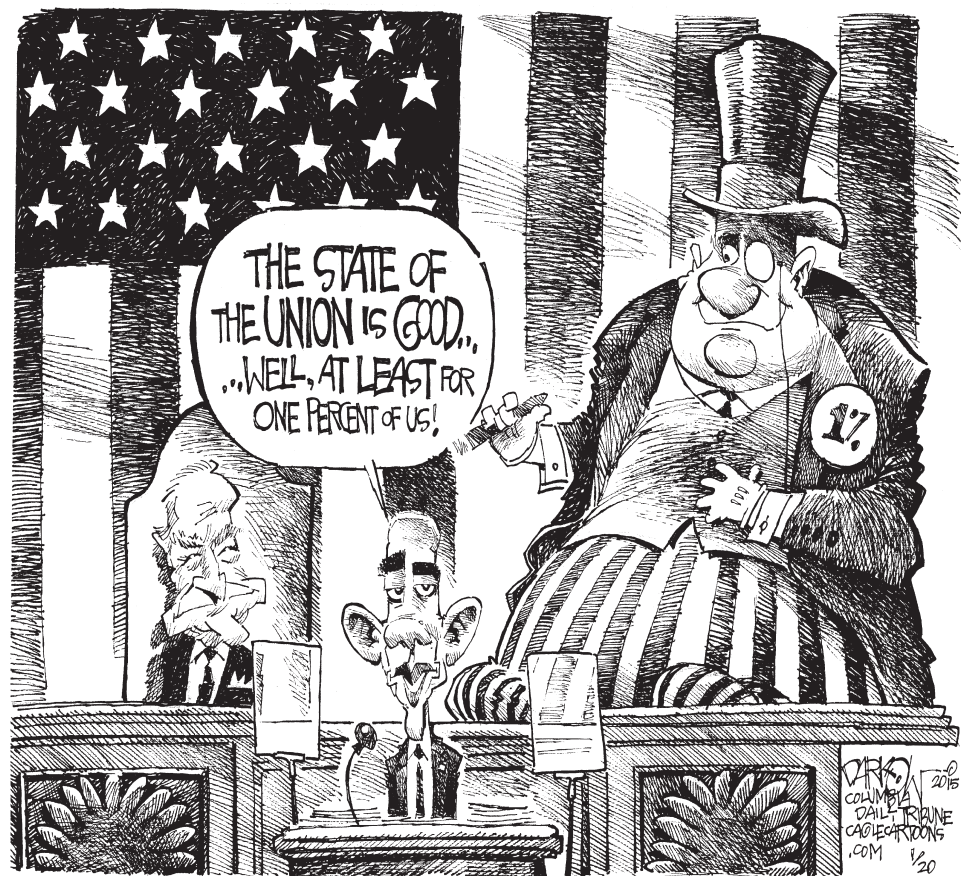
Prosthetic Search

Katie Winckler, Scotland
I am attending my senior year at Scotland High School. In order to graduate, I need to complete a senior project of my choice. I have chosen to do a region-wide Prosthetic & Orthotic Collection. I am willing to accept gently-used prosthetic limbs or orthotics that you may have and no longer have use for. Mail them to P.O. Box 313, Scotland SD 57059. All donations will be sent to a U.S.-based organization called "Limbs for Life."

If you wish to donate money, have an account set up at the

Farmers and Merchants State Bank in Scotland. You can send directly to them at P.O. Box 367, Scotland SD 57059. All funds collected will be sent to the Prosthetics/Orthotic Department at the Twin Cities Shriners Hospital for Children.

I chose this particular project because I have worn a prosthetic on my left leg since I was a baby. The Twin Cities Shriners have been so gracious to help me from the beginning, so I want to give back. It is very personal to me, and I hope have a great success. Any and all help will be greatly appreciated. Thank you!



Conservatives Take On Wealth Disparity?

BY ROBERT B. REICH
Tribune Content Agency

Jeb Bush and Mitt Romney are zeroing in on inequality as America's fundamental economic problem.

Bush's new political action committee, called "The Right to Rise," declares "the income gap is real" but that "only conservative principles can solve it."

Romney likewise promised last week that if he runs for president, he'll change the strategy that led to his 2012 loss to Barack Obama (remember the "makers" versus the "takers?") and focus instead on income inequality, poverty and "opportunity for all people."

The Republican establishment's leading presidential hopefuls know the current upbeat economy isn't trickling down to most Americans. But they've got a whopping credibility problem, starting with trickle-down economics.

Since Ronald Reagan moved into the White House, Republican policies have widened inequality.

Neither party deserves a medal for reversing the trend, but evidence shows that middle-class and poor Americans have fared better under Democratic presidents. Personal disposable income has grown nearly six times more with Democrats in the White House than with Republicans.

Under Bill Clinton, in whose administration I am proud to have served, even the wages of the poorest fifth rose.

According to research by economists Alan Blinder and Mark Watson, more jobs have been created under Democratic presidents as well.

These broad-based job and wage gains haven't hampered economic growth. To the contrary, they've fueled it by putting more money into the pockets of people who spend it — thereby boosting business profits and hiring.

Which is why the economy has grown faster when Democrats have occupied the Oval Office. I'm not saying Democrats have always had it right or done everything they should. The lion's share of economic gains over the past 35 years has gone to the top regardless of whether Democrats or Republicans inhabit the White House.

The most recent recovery has been particularly lopsided, President Obama's intentions notwithstanding.

Nor can presidents alone determine how the economy performs. At best they orchestrate a set of policies that nudge the economy in one direction or another.

But that's exactly the point: Since Reagan, Republican policies have nudged it toward big gains at the top and stagnation for everyone else. The last Republican president to deliver broad-based prosperity was Dwight D. Eisenhower, in the 1950s.

Then, the gains from growth were so widely

shared that the incomes of the poorest fifth actually grew faster than the incomes of the top fifth. As a result, America became more equal than ever before or since.

Under Ike, the marginal tax rate on the richest Americans reached 91 percent.

Eisenhower also presided over the creation of the interstate highway system — the largest infrastructure project in American history — as well as the nation's biggest expansion of public schools.

It's no coincidence that when Eisenhower was president, more than a third of all private sector workers were unionized. Ike can't be credited for this, but at least he didn't try to stop it or legitimize the firing of striking workers, as did Reagan.

Under Reagan, Republican policy lurched in the opposite direction: lower taxes on top incomes and big wealth, less public investment, and efforts to destroy labor unions.

Not surprisingly, that's when America took its big U-turn toward

inequality. These Reaganomic principles are by now so deeply embedded in the modern Republican Party, they've come to define it.

As a matter of fact, they're just about all that unite the warring factions of the GOP — libertarians, tea partiers and big corporations and Wall Street.

Yet because these very principles have contributed to the stagnation of American incomes and the widening gap between the rich and everyone else, Republican presidential aspirants who say they want to reverse widening inequality are faced with an awkward dilemma.

How can they be credible on the issue while embracing these principles? Yet if they want to be nominated, how can they not embrace them?

When Jeb Bush admits that the income gap is real but that "only conservative principles can solve it," one has to wonder what principles he's talking about if not these.

And when Mitt Romney promises to run a different campaign than he did in 2012 and focus on "opportunity for all people," the real question is whether he'll run on different economic principles.

That the leading Republican hopefuls recognize the economy has to work for everyone and not just a few is progress. But unless they disavow the legacy of Ronald Reagan and adopt the legacy of Dwight Eisenhower, their words are nothing more than soothing rhetoric — akin to George W. Bush's meaningless "compassionate conservatism."

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.

Capitol Notebook

The Progress Of The Courts

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — Once a year, Chief Justice David Gilbertson receives the invitation to stand at the front of the South Dakota House of Representatives chamber and speak.

Before him sit the 105 members of the Legislature, the governor, all of the rest of state government's elected officials and the four other members of the Supreme Court.

It is the judicial branch's opportunity to present a report on its activities and to call attention to select matters.

We've seen the chief justice's message produce results through the years.

The Legislature bought into his advocacy of the drug court. The emphasis is on rehabilitation in the community for the offender, rather than being sent behind bars, and help for the offender's household when needed.

One of the key converts was then-Sen. Jerry Apa, R-Lead, who was a co-chairman of the Joint Committee on Appropriations.

We now have drugs courts and DUI courts and the latest version, veterans court.

The Legislature adopted a program to recruit attorneys to underserved rural areas. Sen. Mike Vehle, R-Mitchell, who understands well the challenges in small communities, took the lead.

The Legislature in 2013 adopted reforms and new approaches to allow adult offenders to clean up their lives while in their communities and support their families, rather than go directly to prison.

The package resulted from work in 2012 by the judicial, executive and legislative branches of state government, and by professionals at the local and tribal levels involved in law enforcement and rehabilitation.

A key player in those reforms remains Jim Seward, the governor's legal counsel, who is a former Butte County prosecutor.

And there are truly hundreds of other people, in every county.

In 2014, Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Chief Justice Gilbertson joined on juvenile justice reforms to offer more community services instead of detention. The Legislature will consider the plan this session.

In his State of the Judiciary address Wednesday, the chief justice said he is ready to work on better protection of the elderly. The next day, he noted he also made the offer a few years ago.

Now 65, Gilbertson has been a justice since 1995 and chief justice since 2001. This year he serves as president for the national conference of chief justices and chairs the national center for state courts.

He offered an observation about why the three branches work together in South Dakota: They are in the same building. Last he checked, that was true in five of 50 states.

"My theory is that it is harder to hate or ignore someone you know and see frequently," he said.

"I happen to park next to the governor in the parking lot. A lot of productive conversations have taken place there between Gov. Rounds, then Gov. Daugaard and myself.

"From time to time there have been polite inquiries as to whether the South Dakota Supreme Court would like its own building. My attitude is that we will leave the Capitol when the governor and the Legislature leave and not one day sooner."

There clearly is more David Gilbertson wants to accomplish for South Dakota.