

The Press & Dakotan

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OPINION OTHER VIEWS

Mandatory Sentencing Minimums Still Needed

OMAHA WORLD HERALD (July 1): Nebraska lawmakers, who return to Lincoln in January, should clip and save coverage of the last few days' shooting violence in Omaha.

Separate shootings that killed two people and injured nine others clearly articulate the need to keep mandatory minimum criminal sentences in state law.

They are a reminder of why the Legislature first passed mandatory minimums — to get the bad guys off the streets for longer than a blip.

In this past session, lawmakers nearly passed Legislative Bill 173, a proposal to eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes, drug dealers, sex offenders and repeat criminals. Fortunately, state senators came to their senses during the final round of debate.

Without mandatory minimums, LB 173 would allow a bigger portion of prison sentences to be cut in half by the state's automatic "good time" law.

Which is why LB 173, which remains alive for consideration in next year's session, should remain on ice.

Omaha police say one victim was shot and killed Sunday morning sitting on a porch near 33rd Avenue and Burdette Street by someone traveling past in a car.

A second was killed while driving Monday afternoon near Miller Park by "three little dudes," a witness said.

Guess which crimes would no longer qualify for a minimum prison stay under LB 173? Shooting at an occupied home and from a moving vehicle.

Last year, Omaha police arrested 349 people for felonies that qualified for mandatory minimum sentences. Most of those were for gun and drug offenses.

Police and prosecutors across Nebraska say the threat of minimum prison sentences helps them get and keep bad guys off our streets.

That sounds like a good reason for lawmakers to remember the violence of these past few days and keep mandatory minimum sentences on the books for such serious crimes.

IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
Today is Monday, July 13, the 194th day of 2015. There are 171 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On July 13, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson nominated Thurgood Marshall to be U.S. Solicitor General; Marshall became the first black jurist appointed to the post. (Two years later, Johnson nominated Marshall to the U.S. Supreme Court.)

On this date: In 1793, French revolutionary writer Jean-Paul Marat was stabbed to death in his bath by Charlotte Corday, who was executed four days later.

In 1863, deadly rioting against the Civil War military draft erupted in New York City. (The insurrection was put down three days later.)

In 1923, a sign consisting of 50-foot-tall letters spelling out "HOLLYWOODLAND" was dedicated in the Hollywood Hills to promote a subdivision (the last four letters were removed in 1949).

In 1939, Frank Sinatra made his first commercial recording, "From the Bottom of My Heart" and "Melancholy Mood," with Harry James and his Orchestra for the Brunswick label.

In 1955, Britain hanged Ruth Ellis, a 28-year-old former model and nightclub hostess convicted of killing her boyfriend, David Blakely (to date, Ellis is the last woman to be executed in the United Kingdom).

In 1960, John F. Kennedy won the Democratic presidential nomination on the first ballot at his party's convention in Los Angeles.

In 1972, George McGovern received the Democratic presidential nomination at the party's convention in Miami Beach.

In 1977, a blackout lasting 25 hours hit the New York City area.

In 1978, Lee Iacocca was fired as president of Ford Motor Co. by chairman Henry Ford II.

In 1985, "Live Aid," an international rock concert in London, Philadelphia, Moscow and Sydney, took place to raise money for Africa's starving people.

In 1990, the romantic fantasy "Ghost," starring Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore, was released by Paramount Pictures.

In 1999, Angel Maturino Resendiz, suspected of being the "Railroad Killer," surrendered in El Paso, Texas. (Resendiz was executed in 2006.)

Ten years ago: A suicide car bomb exploded next to U.S. troops handing out candy and toys in Iraq, killing more than two dozen people, including 18 children and teenagers and an American soldier. Former WorldCom boss Bernard Ebbers was sentenced to 25 years in prison for

leading a massive corporate fraud. A fuel gauge aboard Discovery that mistakenly read full instead of empty forced NASA to call off the first shuttle launch in 2 1/2 years.

Five years ago: New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner died in Tampa, Florida, nine days after turning 80. The National League won the All-Star Game, defeating the American League 3-1 in Anaheim, California, to capture its first Midsummer Classic since 1996. Vernon Baker, a black U.S. soldier who belatedly received the Medal of Honor for World War II valor in 1997 after historians concluded he'd been wrongly denied the award because of his race, died at his home near St. Maries, Idaho; he was 90.

One year ago: Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Matthews Burwell met privately with dozens of governors as the Obama administration tried to get support from states that would host thousands of Central American children who had crossed the Mexican border on their own. Thousands of Palestinian residents fled their homes to seek safety in U.N. shelters, heeding warnings from the Israeli military about impending plans to bomb the area in the sixth day of an offensive against Hamas. Germany scored a 1-0 victory over Argentina to win the World Cup final. Death claimed conductor Lorin Maazel, 84; Nobel Prize-winning author Nadine Gordimer, 90; author Thomas Berger, 89.

Today's Birthdays: Game show announcer Johnny Gilbert (TV: "Jeopardy!") is 91. Actor Patrick Stewart is 75. Actor Robert Forster is 74. Actor Harrison Ford is 73. Singer-guitarist Roger McGuinn (The Byrds) is 73. Actor-comedian Cheech Marin is 69. Actress Daphne Maxwell Reid is 67. Actress Didi Conn is 64. Singer Louise Mandrell is 61. Actor-director Cameron Crowe is 58. Tennis player Anders Jarryd is 54. Rock musician Gonzalo Martinez De La Cotera (Marcy Playground) is 53. Actor Michael Jace is 53. Comedian Tom Kenny (TV: "SpongeBob SquarePants") is 53. Country singer-songwriter Victoria Shaw is 53. Bluegrass singer Rhonda Vincent is 53. Actor Kenny Johnson is 52. Roots singer/songwriter Paul Thorn is 51. Country singer Neil Thrasher is 50. Singer Deborah Cox is 42. Actress Ashley Scott is 38. Rock musician Will Champion (Coldplay) is 37. Actor Fran Kranz is 34. Actor Colton Haynes is 27. Actor Steven R. McQueen is 27. Actor Kyle Harrison Breitkopf (TV: "The Whispers") is 10.

Thought for Today: "Back of every mistaken venture and defeat is the laughter of wisdom, if you listen." — Carl Sandburg, American writer (1878-1967).

FROM THE BIBLE

Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words." Daniel 10:12. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Shopping Options

Carie Schneider, Yankton
This is a response to Mr. Gleich's idea that Yankton needs another grocery store (*Press & Dakotan*, July 2). I have to respectfully disagree.

Yes, I know you are thinking of just Hy-Vee and Walmart, but there are also food options at the Dollar Store, Kmart and Walgreens. I am aware that those are not "produce places," but they ARE options. If you require more instances of where to get fresh produce in this town, try the Yankton Produce Program, SHARE, the farmer's market, Steiner's Locker (for fresh meat), Gundy's by Charlie's Pizza, contact a local farmer (we all know one!) or perhaps grow your own, and can or freeze it.

As for the "price" issue, Hy-Vee and Walmart are probably two of the most affordable places you can find. Do you really want to shell out more money at a place like Whole Foods when just a few days ago, they admitted that they had been jacking up the prices? Personally, I love Hy-Vee and would not want to shop anywhere else.

There ARE other options out there, Mr. Gleich. You just need to look for them.



Capitol Notebook

Teachers' Pay: Solutions Are Financially Clear

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — A few years ago the Legislature turned to an outside review to improve operations. The state Wildlife Division at the governor's direction paid for a similar review. Both worked.

Now the Blue Ribbon education task force commissioned by Gov. Dennis Daugaard is looking at K-12 funding, especially teacher salaries. South Dakota ranks last nationally.

The task force heard on July 7 from Michael Griffith, a school-funding consultant for the Education Commission of the States. If you've followed South Dakota's K-12 funding fights, Griffith's outside review shouldn't surprise you.

But having his possible solutions, from someone with a nationwide perspective, adds weight. Consider what he suggested:

- Require school districts to spend at least a certain percentage of their funding for classroom instruction or teacher salaries. South Dakota districts on average spend about 1.3 percent below the national average, a difference statewide of about \$13 million, Griffith found;

- Earmark current funding or additional funding for teacher salaries. South Dakota teachers earned an average of about \$38,000, ranking last in the most recent national ranking. The \$13 million, spread across approximately 10,000 teachers and other classroom staff, would equal about \$1,300 more annually; and

- Establish a minimum teacher salary and set a statewide salary schedule. Legislators and governors for decades have expressed support for local control, but school superintendents and school board members repeatedly see the state treasury as the place to get more money. Tie them together through salary policy.

The Griffith report is at blueribbon.sd.gov.



Bob MERCER

We've mentioned this before in various writings, but this year is the 20th anniversary of the property-tax controls put into place statewide for school districts, counties and cities by then-Gov. Bill Janklow and the Legislature in 1995.

Those controls worked — property taxes went down, for a while, in many places because state aid to schools increased — but the diet is producing skinnier and skinnier wages for public employees.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol currently offers a \$3,000 sign-on bonus, if I caught the ad right. The state Revenue Department had to raise wages for title processors in the Division of Motor Vehicles because other jobs paid better.

School administrators say the stacks of applications they received even 10 years ago for teaching vacancies now are down to a handful — and sometimes not even one that is acceptable.

South Dakota voters expressed their opinion in November 2014 when a majority of 55 percent supported increasing the statewide minimum wage to \$8.50 per hour from \$7.25, effective Jan. 1, 2015.

The Legislature's Republicans (for the most part) approved a youth minimum wage of \$7.50 per hour, with no adjustment clause, this year. It's on hold, however, until a statewide vote on the November 2016 ballot.

The teacher-salary problem became further evident this year when the Legislature added a penalty clause for school employees who break a contract.

Binding people to jobs they want to leave over pay doesn't seem productive.

Yet no group testified against HB 1044, a broad measure about discipline and certification of school employees, from the state Education Department.

Read the Griffith report. His numbers aren't fiction. They tell us about ourselves.

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DISSIDENCE: "Acceptance by government of a dissident press is a measure of the maturity of a nation." — William O. Douglas

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS: It's Your Right To Know!

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**. Bypassed 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/.

The Lost Art Of Conversation

Rita Eckmann, Bloomfield, Neb.
I went to the chiropractor's office and the 17- or 18-year-old boy I sat next to was playing with his toy. In the old days, it would have been possible to strike up a conversation.
Now all attention is given to a tiny electronic device. Pretty soon conversation will be a thing of the past just like written letters.

A Victory For Equal Rights

John Magnuson, Yankton
If national polls are accurate, most Americans approve of the U.S. Supreme Court's recent same-sex marriage ruling. This is one in a series of needed civil rights advances for disparaged groups who have suffered greatly from injustice. Gays have been denied access to the military, have been blacklisted by the FBI, have been denied employment, have been bullied and disrespected, and have been told they are going to hell. Despite biological evidence, they have been told that their sexual preference was a lifestyle choice. This court decision is a victory for the American way of equal rights for everyone.

Those disappointed by the decision should bear in mind that our country is the most diverse in the world. Despite your beliefs, America is not a Christian nation but is comprised of many belief systems. We are a nation of religious freedom and no one religion will impose its belief system on the whole. It is your mistake if you thought this was so.

Public officials who deny county marriage licenses should be sued with gusto and relieved of their positions. It is a time to welcome overdue changes and to not be afraid.

Keep an open mind.