

The Press & Dakotan

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We Say

Honored



THUMBS UP to Jeff and Jolene Steffen and their children, Jenna and Cole, for being named the Yankton Area Chamber of Commerce's "Farm Family of the Year." The Steffens have farmed southeast of Crofton, Nebraska, since they were married in 1984. Their farm is a diversified operation of row crop, livestock and certified seed production. They have promoted soil, water and wildlife conservation. Jeff has served on several boards and commissions, while Jolene has promoted the rural life with her artwork. In addition, Cole won a Promoting Agricultural Youth (PAY) scholarship from the Chamber for his work with drone technology and agriculture. Jenna is finishing her medical residency. Congratulations to a deserving family.

Excellence!



THUMBS UP to Bon Homme science teacher Janet Wagner who travels to Washington, D.C., next week to receive the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST). President Obama is scheduled to present the awards in a White House ceremony. For Wagner, the award comes as she enters her 42nd and final year of teaching. She stresses both lectures and hand-on learning, and the approach has earned her the nation's highest honor for science teachers. Congratulations on the award.

A Great Fish Story



THUMBS UP and a shout out to former University of South Dakota football player and current Washington offensive lineman Tom Compton for his cameo in the Syfy made-for-TV movie "Sharknado 3: Oh Hell No!" Compton makes a quick appearance, playing a TV reporter who interviews Michelle Bachmann about an evacuation of Washington, D.C., where the movie is set. (If you're not familiar with the premise of the "Sharknado" movies... well, consider yourself somehow blessed.) While the "Sharknado" franchise does not particularly represent the pinnacle of television making — the movies are basically a cheese factory that aren't meant to be taken seriously — they are popular with some viewers. Congrats for Compton for his screen time.

Half-Mast



THUMBS DOWN to the late response of the Obama administration is lowering flags to half-mast in the wake of the five shooting deaths in Chattanooga last week. It took the White House five days to make the decree, which is a slow and unfortunate response. While flying a flag at half-mast is a symbolic gesture, it surely resonates with many Americans. It also didn't help that the U.S. Capitol and the White House did not undertake this gesture at the same time, with the Capitol lowering its flags a day before the White House decision. Unfortunately but not surprisingly, this turned into a minor political football, which had more to do with grandstanding than it did with the issues of respect and, really, coping with the issues of this tragedy.

ONLINE OPINION

The results of the most recent Internet poll on the Press & Dakotan's Web site are as follows:

LATEST RESULTS:

Do you consider Pluto a full-fledged planet?
Yes.....74%
Not sure/don't care.....22%
No.....4%

TOTAL VOTES CAST.....239
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 think will win the Republican nomination for president in 2016?
To cast your vote in the PRESS & DAKOTAN'S Internet poll, log on to our website at www.yankton.net.

IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Friday, July 24, the 205th day of 2015. There are 160 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On July 24, 1915, the SS Eastland, a passenger ship carrying more than 2,500 people, rolled onto its side while docked at the Clark Street Bridge on the Chicago River; an estimated 844 people died in the disaster.

On this date: In 1783, Latin American revolutionary Simon Bolivar was born in Caracas, Venezuela.

In 1862, Martin Van Buren, the eighth president of the United States, and the first to have been born a U.S. citizen, died at age 79 in Kinderhook, New York, the town where he was born in 1782.

In 1866, Tennessee became the first state to be readmitted to the Union after the Civil War.

In 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne, which settled the boundaries of modern Turkey, was concluded in Switzerland.

In 1937, the state of Alabama dropped charges against four of the nine young black men accused of raping two white women in the "Scottsboro Case."

In 1959, during a visit to Moscow, Vice President Richard Nixon engaged in his famous "Kitchen Debate" with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.

In 1969, the Apollo 11 astronauts — two of whom had been the first men to set foot on the moon — splashed down safely in the Pacific.

In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that President Richard Nixon had to turn over subpoenaed White House tape recordings to the Watergate special prosecutor.

In 1975, an Apollo spacecraft splashed down in the Pacific, completing a mission which included the first-ever docking with a Soyuz capsule from the Soviet Union.

In 1980, comedian-actor Peter Sellers died in London at 54.

In 1998, a gunman burst into the U.S. Capitol, killing two police officers before being shot and captured. (The shooter, Russell Eugene Weston Jr., is being held in a federal mental facility.)

In 2002, nine coal miners became trapped in a flooded tunnel of the Quecreek Mine in western Pennsylvania; the story ended happily 77 hours later with the rescue of all nine.

Ten years ago: Lance Armstrong won his seventh consecutive Tour de France (he was later stripped of all his titles after admitting to doping). Sir Richard Doll, the British scientist who first established a link between smoking and lung cancer, died in Oxford, England, at age 92.

Five years ago: A stampede inside a tunnel crowded with techno music fans left 21 people dead and more than 500 injured at the famed Love Parade festival in western Germany. Fourteen-year-old Jim Liu beat Justin Thomas 4 and 2 to become the youngest U.S. Junior Amateur champion at Egypt Valley Country Club in Ada, Michigan.

One year ago: Air Algerie Flight 5017, an MD-83 carrying 116 people, crashed in northern Mali, killing all on board; it was the third major international aviation disaster in a week. A psychiatrist's patient opened fire at a medical complex in Media, Pennsylvania, killing his caseworker and grazing his psychiatrist before the doctor pulled out his own weapon and fired back, wounding the patient. Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice received a two-game suspension from the NFL following his offseason arrest for domestic violence after an altercation with then-fiancee (later wife) Janay Palmer in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Today's Birthdays: Actor John Aniston is 82. Political cartoonist Pat Oliphant is 80. Comedian Ruth Buzzi is 79. Actor Mark Goddard is 79. Actor Dan Hedaya is 75. Actor Chris Sarandon is 73. Comedian Gallagher is 69. Actor Robert Hays is 68. Former Republican national chairman Marc Racicot is 67. Actor Michael Richards is 66. Actress Lynda Carter is 64. Movie director Gus Van Sant is 63. Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., is 62. Country singer Pam Tillis is 58. Actor Paul Ben-Victor is 53. Basketball Hall of Famer Karl Malone is 52. Retired MLB All-Star Barry Bonds is 51. Actor Kadeem Hardison is 50. Actress-singer Kristin Chenoweth is 47. Actress Laura Leighton is 47. Actor John P. Navin Jr. is 47. Actress-singer Jennifer Lopez is 46. Basketball player-turned-actor Rick Fox is 46. Actor Eric Szmanda is 40. Actress Rose Byrne is 36. Country singer Jerrod Niemann is 36. Actress Summer Glau is 34. Actress Elisabeth Moss is 33. Actress Anna Paquin is 33. Actress Megan Park is 29. Actress Mara Wilson is 28. Rock singer Jay McGuiness (The Wanted) is 25. Actress Emily Bett Rickards is 24. TV personality Bindi Irwin is 17.

Thought for Today: "People who jump to conclusions rarely align on them." — Philip Guedalla, British writer (1889-1944).

FROM THE BIBLE

He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There did we rejoice in Him, who rules by His might forever. Psalm 66:6-7. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.



Kelly Hertz

Life In The Pocket

BY KELLY HERTZ

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Life can seem a bit frustrating sometimes in the pocket.

That, apparently, is where we live — the word "we" referring to many (but not all) residents of Yankton Clay, Cedar and Knox counties who, according to meteorologists, reside in a shrinking area in the upper Plains around which dry conditions are disappearing thanks to ample rains that have blanketed much of the region. In fact, this entire nation (apart from parched California) saw the wettest May on record.

But somehow, we've been missing out on most of this. As I write this, we're unofficially about 4 1/2 inches behind normal for rainfall.

It must be emphasized how small this "pocket" is. For example, if you go to the north end of Yankton County (which is not a big county), you would likely see a little water still standing in some low spots in fields. So, yes, the "pocket" is a small area.

Nevertheless, it is indeed also a frustrating area. I feel that weight every few days when I study the weather radar as another color wheel of possibilities builds to the west or south and moves our way. And every time, I fall for it. Last Friday night was a good example. I saw reds and yellows mushrooming across the screen and building back to the southwest, and all of it was lurching toward us. And I thought — yet again — "This time, we're going to get a good shot of rain. This time, it's going to happen."

We got about .15 hundredths out of the whole thing.

It's a lot like Charlie Brown trying to kick that football. You hitch up your hopes and come to believe, "This time, for sure..."

But so it goes. Admittedly, you can't really tell how little rain we've gotten by looking around. There's a carpet of green covering the landscape, and the crops sure look good. Whatever rain we have managed to get has apparently been just enough to tide us over. It's somewhat like a baseball team with great pitching but scraping up just enough offense to win a few games here and there. (Let's call this the New York Mets syndrome.) But this isn't a sustainable practice, and eventually it will catch up with us.

Still, the biggest toll of living in this pocket, at least for me, is psychological. I've lived through numerous wet cycles and dry cycles, and the memories of the droughts always linger and never really leave you.

Conversely, I think there is something very therapeutic about rain. It sounds wonderful sometimes and rejuvenates the landscape. And of course it leaves behind water, which happens to be a telltale sign of possible life on other planets. It's the most basic building block of existence. And when it's not falling on us, sooner or later, we start fretting.

I think back to three years ago when everything seemed brown, dry, hot and hopeless. That epic drought covered the entire central section of the nation, which sowed a wide-ranging gloom; on the other hand, there was a grim comfort in knowing that so many people were stuck in the same dry-docked boat.

This time, those of us in the pocket keep seeing rain opportunities continually drift around us or dissipate before they reach us. Eventually, we may even begin to take it personally.

(We can, however, take comfort in the fact that we aren't facing what California is enduring. But in our frustration, it can sometimes feel like we're headed somehow in that direction.)

Unscientifically speaking, I think we're closer to the end of this pocket existence than to the beginning. For one thing, we've been hearing more thunder lately, and that's a music that's been missing for much of this spring and summer. Thunder and lightning are attributes of atmospheric energy, and without them, potential rain events can't really build up enough to amount to much. So, we're starting to hear a little more energy in our atmosphere, and that could take us somewhere. It's just a matter of when.

Hopefully, this pocket will disappear gradually with soaking, non-threatening rains, not all at once in a stormy explosion marred with hail and wind. That's the last thing we need, as a cursory glance at the countryside would tell you.

Until then, we just watch the radar and listen to the reports of all the rain falling elsewhere — everywhere, it seems, but this vanishing but stubbornly persistence pocket.

Follow @kelly_hertz on Twitter.

Wanted: A Real Justice System

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.

Tribune Content Agency

The United States does not have a justice system.

If we define a justice system as a system designed for the production of justice, then it seems obvious that term cannot reasonably be applied to a system that countenances the mass incarceration by race and class of hundreds of thousands of nonviolent offenders. Any system that vacuums in one out of every three African-American males while letting a banker who launders money for terrorist-connected organizations, Mexican drug cartels and Russian mobsters off with a fine is not a justice system. No, you call that an injustice system.

This is something I've been saying for years. Imagine my surprise when, last week, President Obama said it, too.

"Any system that allows us to turn a blind eye to hopelessness and despair," he said in a speech before the NAACP in Philadelphia, "that's not a justice system, that's an injustice system." He called for reforms, including the reduction or elimination of mandatory minimum sentencing and the repeal of laws that bar ex-felons from voting.

This was the day after Obama commuted the sentences of 46 nonviolent drug offenders, and two days before he became the first president to visit a prison, Federal Correctional Institution El Reno, near Oklahoma City. "There but for the grace of God," he said, minutes after poking his head into an empty 9-by-10 cell that houses three inmates.

It was more than just an acknowledgment of his personal good fortune. Given that Obama, his two immediate predecessors, and such disparate luminaries as Sarah Palin, John Kerry, Newt Gingrich, Al Gore, Jeb Bush and Rick Santorum are known to have used illicit drugs when they were younger, it was also a tacit acknowledgment that fate takes hairpin turns. And that the veil separating drug offender from productive citizen is thinner than we sometimes like to admit.

Welcome to what may be a transformational moment: the end of an odious era of American juris-



Leonard PITTS

prudence. Meaning, the era of mass incarceration.

Apparently, the president has decided to make this a priority of his final 18 months in office. Even better, the call for reform enjoys bipartisan support. Republican Senators Rand Paul and Ted Cruz, among others, have embraced the cause. And the very conservative Koch Brothers have chosen to "ban the box" (i.e., stop requiring ex-offenders to disclose their prison records to prospective employers on their job applications).

All of which raises the promise that, just maybe, something will actually be done.

It is long past "about time." Our color-coded, class-conscious, zero-tolerance, punishment-centric, mandatory minimum system of "justice" has made us the largest jailer on earth. One in four of the world's prisoners is in an American lockup. This insane rate of imprisonment has strained resources and decimated communities.

It has also shattered families and impoverished children, particularly black ones. So many people bewail or condemn the fact that a disproportionate number of black children grow up without fathers, never connecting the dots to the fact that a disproportionate number of black fathers are locked up for the same nonviolent drug offenses for which white fathers routinely go free.

The "get tough on crime" wave that swept over this country in the '80s and '90s was born of the unfortunate American penchant for applying simplistic answers to complicated questions. But bumper sticker solutions have a way of bringing unintended consequences.

We will be dealing with these unintended consequences for generations to come. But perhaps we are finally ready to take steps toward reversing that historic blunder.

And giving America a justice system worthy of the name.

Leonard Pitts is a columnist for The Miami Herald, 1 Herald Plaza, Miami, Fla., 33132. Readers may contact him via e-mail at lpitts@miamiherald.com.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Iran: Saving Lives

John Magnuson, Yankton

There are many pundits and political types who wish to influence American thought about the Iran nuke deal because a precedent has been set to avoid diplomacy in international problem solving in favor of imposing American military might to dictate terms. It begs the question of which approach, military or diplomatic, is more effective in the long term. America has been in four wars after WWII, Korea, Vietnam, two in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. Arguably the only war clearly won was the first Iraqi war. Yet Americans suffered many casualties and created a budget deficit for results that just didn't pan out. We have an incurable overconfident belief that going to war is the best approach.

The Iran nuke deal is an amazing opportunity to change the course of history without losing more American lives. Shouldn't we give a diplomatic solution a chance after so many

military failures and loss of lives? Don't we owe this to our soldiers? The nay sayers are determined to keep a certain balance of power in the area which doesn't seem sustainable given ISIS and the chaos. The middle east needs a better system of power sharing that can solve their own problems without our military intervention. Do American neocons really want another war to make money in defense contracts for the one percenters and to waste our lives for poorly calculated results.

We should tell our politicians to support this deal and give diplomacy a chance. Save American lives!

Bigoted?

Terre Berkland, Yankton

This is in response to Lois Keck's letter (Press & Dakotan, July 17): I, as a Christian, take offense to your suggestion that all Christian's view the world through bigoted eyes.