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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Farm Bill Revives
Some Failed Policies

CAPITAL JOURNAL, Pierre (June 16): South Dakota Sen. John Thune was right to vote no last week as his Senate colleagues, including South Dakota Sen. Tim Johnson, voted to pass the Senate version of the farm bill.

It's been curiously named the "Agriculture Reform, Jobs and Food Act." But let's be honest: Just what does "reform" have to do with some of the tired old ideas about commodities in this legisla-tion?

Consider where we stand now: The Environmental Working Group, which is sometimes hated in farm country because it tracks farm program payments, said that federal subsidies to American farmers totaled \$292.5 billion — that's billion with a 'b' — from 1995-2012. But 75 percent of that taxpayer charity went to only 10 percent of farmers.

In South Dakota, which ranks eighth among the states in farm subsidy receipts, subsidies totaled \$11.1 billion over that same time frame, and 62 percent of the subsidies went to 10 percent of farms.

So does the proposed farm bill envision some way of reforming this system so that it won't lean so heavily on the transfer of the taxpayers' cash to farmers' pockets — including that top 10 percent, those really big farmers who seem to need the biggest hand-outs?

By no means. Instead, Sen. Thune's remarks suggest the new legislation is taking us back into the same old mistakes of the past through "adverse market payments," or the AMP program.

"This program takes a step backward from last year's farm bill by recreating a program with counter-cyclical payments and fixed target prices," Thune said in remarks carried on C-SPAN. "This policy predates cellphones. This policy predates the Internet. This is going back to 1980s-style farm policy."

Some language in the bill would even have Congress setting fixed prices for commodities.

"The market — not Congress and not the USDA — should be setting prices for Title I commodities," Thune said. "If fixed target prices are set too high, and commodity prices drop, history has proven that farmers will once again begin planting for a govern-ment program rather than in response to market signals. This not only creates a potential unnecessary liability for taxpayers, but it also increases the risk of overproduction and negative impacts on global markets, making certain crops subject to possible WTO disputes."

We give Sen. Thune a standing ovation for saying what America needs to hear and at least attempting to offer an amendment to get rid of this backward-looking legislation. Unfortunately, the business-as-usual Senate considered only 14 of more than 200 amendments that had been filed, and did not include two amend-ments by Thune in its final version.

Thune would have ditched the idea of fixed target prices and he would have required USDA to track native sod and longstanding grassland acres converted to cropland.

It's worth noting that what Sen. Thune is objecting to is called "central planning" in Marxist countries. Here we call it part of the farm bill. It's a bad idea no matter what you call it, and it has done nothing to stem the decline in farm numbers and farming commu-nities. Time to think differently.

OUR LETTER POLICY

The PRESS & DAKOTAN encourages its readers to write letters to the editor, and it asks 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 busi-nesses.

■ 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 to views@yankton.net.

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press

Today is Monday, June 24, the 175th day of 2013. There are 190 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On June 24, 1983, the space shuttle Challenger — carrying America's first woman in space, Sally K. Ride — coasted to a safe landing at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

On this date: In 1314, the forces of Scotland's King Robert I defeated the English in the Battle of Bannock-burn.

In 1509, Henry VIII was crowned king of England; his wife, Catherine of Aragon, was crowned queen consort.

In 1793, the first republican con-stitution in France was adopted.

In 1813, American clergyman and social reformer Henry Ward Beecher was born in Litchfield, Conn.

In 1908, the 22nd and 24th presi-dents of the United States, Grover Cleveland, died in Princeton, N.J., at age 71.

In 1940, France signed an armistice with Italy during World War II.

In 1948, Communist forces cut off all land and water routes between West Germany and West Berlin, prompting the western allies to organ-ize the Berlin Airlift. The Republican National Convention, meeting in Philadelphia, nominated New York Gov. Thomas E. Dewey for president. In 1968, "Resurrection City," a shantytown constructed as part of the Poor People's March on Washington D.C., was closed down by authorities.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon concluded his summit with the visiting leader of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev, who hailed the talks in an address on American television.

In 1975, 113 people were killed when an Eastern Airlines Boeing 727 crashed while attempting to land dur-ing a thunderstorm at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport.

In 1982, a British Airways Boeing 747 lost power in all four engines while passing through volcanic ash generated by Mount Galunggung in Indonesia. (The crew managed to restart the engines and make a safe emergency landing in Jakarta.)

In 1993, David Gelernter, a Yale University computer scientist, was se-riously injured by a mail bomb sent

from the Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski.

Ten years ago: Six British sol-diers were killed by Iraqis in a police station in southern Iraq and eight were wounded in a nearby ambush. President Vladimir Putin arrived in London on the first state visit to Britain by a Russian leader since the 19th century. A museum-bound Air France Concorde landed in southwestern Germany.

Five years ago: Zimbabwe Pres-ident Robert Mugabe refused to give in to pressure from Africa and the West, saying the world could "shout as loud as they like" but he would not cancel an upcoming runoff election even though his opponent had quit the race. Leonid Hurwicz, who shared the Nobel Prize in economics in 2007, died in Minneapolis at age 90.

One year ago: The Muslim Broth-erhood's Mohammed Morsi was de-clared the winner of Egypt's first free presidential election. New York Attor-ney General Eric Schneiderman an-nounced a settlement that would bring \$405 million to victims of Bernard Madoff's historic investment scam.

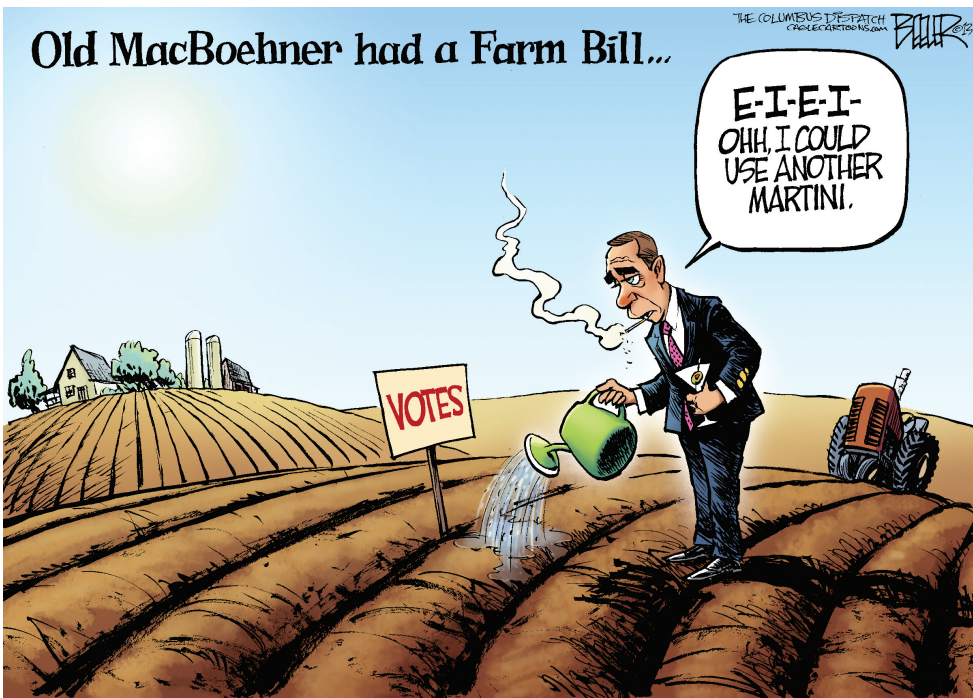
Today's Birthdays: Actor Al Moli-naro is 94. Comedian Jack Carter is 90. Rock singer Arthur Brown is 71. Actress Michele Lee is 71. Actor-di-rector Georg Stanford Brown is 70. Rock musician Jeff Beck is 69. Rock singer Colin Blunstone (The Zombies) is 68. Musician Mick Fleetwood is 66. Actor Peter Weller is 66. Rock musi-cian John Illsley (Dire Straits) is 64. Actress Nancy Allen is 63. Reggae singer Derrick Simpson (Black Uhuru) is 63. Actor Joe Penny is 57. Reggae singer Astro (UB40) is 56. Singer-mu-sician Andy McCluskey (Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark) is 54. Actor Iain Glen (TV: "Game of Thrones"; "Downton Abbey") is 52. Rock singer Curt Smith is 52. Actress Danielle Spencer is 48. Actress Sherry String-field is 46. Singer Glenn Medeiros is 43. Actress-producer Mindy Kaling is 34. Actress Minka Kelly is 33. Actress Kaitlin Cullum is 27. Singer Solange Knowles is 27.

Thought for Today: There is a way to look at the past. Don't hide from it. It will not catch you if you don't repeat it." — Pearl Bailey, American singer and actress (1918-1990).

FROM THE BIBLE

Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? Matthew 2:2.
Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

Old MacBoehner had a Farm Bill...



Losing Your Religion

BY BILL O'REILLY

Creators Syndicate

It was interesting to watch the state of Texas recently pass a law that allows anyone to say the greeting "Merry Christ-mas" in the state's public schools and buildings. Gov. Rick Perry signed the law saying he wished it wasn't necessary, but, in his opinion, pro-protecting the words "Merry Christmas" has to be done because they are under fire from the freedom-from-reli-gion crew.

America has been heading down the secular road for decades, and a new Gallup poll reinforces that. When asked whether religion is los-ing its influence on American life, 77 percent said yes. Just 20 percent dis-agreed.

But another question in the same poll was more instructive: "If more Americans were religious, would that be a positive or a negative for American society?" An astounding 75 percent said it would be positive. Only 17 percent believe it would be negative. Eight percent don't know.

Here's what I know. It is not easy to be reli-gious in a culture that encourages individual-ism and materialism at the same time. Little children are by nature selfish; they want what they want. They must be taught to be gener-ous and to think about the needs of others.

But many parents do not do that. They don't have time. They are too busy getting stuff for themselves. Thus, the urchins grow up to be selfish and insensitive.

More than 80 percent of Americans de-scribe themselves as "Christian," a philosophy that demands self-sacrifice and loving others as yourself. But that message largely has been lost because it's not a moneymaker, and there is no charismatic Christian leader in sight.

I mean, when was the last time you saw an American religious leader capture the attention of the American public? Billy Graham was the last Christian preacher to have a national following.

Bill
O'REILLY

My own religion, Roman Catholicism, is in steep decline in this country. Many churches are half-empty on Sundays, especially in the big cities. The priest scandals seriously dam-aged the moral authority of the church, but for the faithful, the problem goes far beyond that.

Last Sunday, I took my two chil-dren to mass, and we had a priest from Nigeria. He's a nice man, but you can't understand him unless you're from Nigeria, which my family is not. So we sat there for almost 20 minutes while the priest spoke about Jesus from the pulpit. I did recognize the name Jesus but little else. My kids slipped into comas.

Religious leaders have an obliga-tion to spread the good word. How many of them are doing that effec-tively?

If you believe the Gallup poll, Americans want a religious nation because they know a strong moral foundation brings much more freedom than a free-fire zone of self-absorbed behavior. Once upon a time, most Americans did not have to lock their doors or watch their children every second of the day. Now, drug addiction and other de-structive behaviors have driven crime and de-generacy into almost every American neighborhood. Religion opposes self-destruc-tion and criminal activity. It is sinful. It does not lead to prosperity in this world or the next.

Communicated in the right way, Judeo-Christian philosophy and the religions that up-hold it bind a citizenry together in pursuit of a just and generous society. That is the spirit that most Americans admire and want to reignite. But we need some leaders to light up the pathway.

Where are they?

Veteran TV news anchor Bill O'Reilly is host of the Fox News show "The O'Reilly Fac-tor" and author of the book "Pinheads and Pa-triots: Where You Stand in the Age of Obama."

Zimmerman's Jury Of Peers

BY KATHLEEN PARKER

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WASHINGTON — The headlines were immedi-ate: All-women jury chosen for George Zimmer-man's trial.

What is the likelihood that you, a man, would face a jury of all women? What are the chances that one-third of the jurors judging you on a charge of second-degree murder identify their hobby as saving animals?

Finally, what's your bet that the vic-tim in the case, an unarmed African-American teenager, will receive justice from a panel that is five-sixths white?

We depend on reassuring answers to such questions, but our headlines belie our skepticism. Do we really trust our peers?

To briefly recount, Zimmerman, 29, is charged with the fatal shooting of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. Zimmerman, a volunteer watchman, saw Martin walking through his neighborhood, thought he looked suspicious, and the rest is familiar to any-one reading this.

What makes the jury interesting, other than the head-snapping reporting of its composition, is that it forces to the fore all the implications we try to avoid: Do gender, race, ethnicity (age, sex-ual orientation, and so on) matter when it comes to judging one another? We like to think not, yet, admit it, the reason the all-women jury made headlines is because it raises those very ques-tions.

Indeed, those questions are at the heart of the prosecution's case.

Zimmerman, who avers that he acted in self-defense, is accused of profiling Martin and acting accordingly. Because Martin was African-Amer-ican and wearing a hooded shirt (it was raining), Martin presumably took him to be dangerous — inherently so, not because of anything overtly threatening.

Martin, en route from a convenience store back to his own home, was, to Zimmerman's eyes, wandering, aimlessly. Ergo: Doesn't belong? Up to no good? We now know that Martin was talking on the phone to his girlfriend, perhaps daydreaming a little, meandering in his conversa-tion rather than "acting suspiciously."

Would a white teen similarly attired have been adjudged suspicious and potentially dan-gerous by Zimmerman? The prosecutors think not. Yet, we also know that Zimmerman, who is Hispanic, worked as a volunteer with black youth. He wasn't by any apparent standard a racist. But he decided that someone who looked like Martin didn't belong in a neighborhood where several break-ins recently had occurred.

Kathleen
PARKER

Was his deduction logical or racist — or both? Consciously or not, we all make such judg-ments every day. We cross the street to avoid someone whose dress, behavior or some other signal makes us feel less secure. It's human na-ture deeply rooted in thousands of years of sur-vival.

Understanding this is no justifica-tion for harmful actions, obviously, but behavior can't be judged independent of context. This is the essence of what Zimmerman's jury will have to con-sider. Under the circumstances, might a reasonable person have responded as Zimmerman did? As to what really hap-pened during a scuffle only Zimmerman is alive to describe, jurors will have to fill in blanks using their own best judg-ment.

And what about that jury? Most likely, news of the all-women panel prompted involuntary thoughts: Can such a jury fairly judge a man? Would we ask the same were the defen-dant a female and the jury all-male?

If two jurors are so softhearted that they re-scue animals (would that everyone did), are they tough enough to condemn a man to life in prison? Will five white women be inclined to side with Zimmerman because of their similar skin pigmentation and possible experiences with race?

We naturally recoil at such questions because they offend our sense of justice. We trust juries because there is no better alternative. By our consent to the process, we are putting our faith in the better angels of man's nature. We console ourselves with the knowledge that jurors typi-cally take their jobs seriously and try to be fair.

But history also reminds us that intentions are not reliable predictors of behavior. We tend our biases in secret, sometimes even from our-selves, and we project our own experiences onto others. Even the president of the United States stepped forward to identify himself with Martin, about whom he said, "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon."

What is this if not racial identification? And is the president's statement itself prejudicial to ju-rors who, wanting not to appear racist, may be more inclined to convict?

In our racially diverse, proudly multicultural nation, it isn't clear whether a jury of one's peers is possible. Whatever the outcome, the Zimmer-man trial will force us to confront our own biases — a necessary step toward the aspiration we call blind justice.

Kathleen Parker's email address is kathleen-parker@washpost.com.

YOUR LETTERS

Doo Something!

Eileen Honner, Yankton

I'd like to address this to folks who have dogs: Please pick up your dog's "Doo-Doo"

when it is deposited in someone else's yard. It is not too pleasant when those of us without dogs are walking in or mowing our yards and step in it. YUCK! Thank you.