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OPINION | OUR VIEW

A Fading Drought Leaves A Lesson

The word from South Dakota's Drought Task Force Monday was sweet news to area residents, particularly farmers: The drought in eastern South Dakota may well be over. Making such a prediction just three months ago would have been viewed as a dream, but the eastern part of the state has seen enough good rains this spring to set things somewhat back to normal.

Or, to put it another way, since the region has been buffeted with storms and occasional flash flood watches and warnings the last few weeks, it's not too hard NOW to believe the drought has abated.

Still, the memory of the drought will linger on for quite a while — or at least one should hope.

For a lot of people — for instance, younger farmers — the drought had to be a devastating eye-opener. It could be argued that a lot of these souls knew nothing of such dry times; it's always rained, after all, even in years that were considered "dry." Many of these people had always counted on Mother Nature to come through, and she always had — until last year.

Now, the drought should serve as a reminder that rain does not fall like clockwork and water has a real value.

That may seem obvious, but the way farmers continue to delve headlong into tiling and channeling fields in order to move off unwanted water might be cause to wonder.

Tiling is all the rage in farming country, so much so that some installers of the piping cannot keep up with the extraordinary demand. Farmers want to make sure as much of their land as possible can be used for crop production, and shutting water out of low spots and out of the way is one means to that end.

We understand and acknowledge the argument that tiling can help drain land that tends to store too much water in some years. But in this region, which is naturally borderline semi-arid, the practice seems to have moved well beyond such spongy circumstances. (We've heard of farmers who even irrigate tiled land, which seems to work two ways at once in terms of logic.)

There is something to be said for water storage, which appears to have become a low priority for some business plans. This is not to suggest that storing water would have made all the difference last year, but it might have helped cushion the blow in terms of caring for livestock, for instance.

Water truly is an indispensable commodity, and yet agribusiness seems more geared for getting it out of the way and relying instead on whatever the skies drop on them. That's fine when it rains, but when it doesn't ...

So, will the brutal memories of last year change all this? Will water storage take on an added — even an urgent — importance as farmers work out their plans for their fields and livestock? Will we realize that perhaps it isn't always best to drain that water away — to wherever it goes (which is another issue that must be addressed)?

Judging from the booming demand for tiling, the answers to those questions seems frustratingly clear.

Thus, the hard lessons from a hard drought — which came and went quite quickly, meaning it could always do a rapid return — may not have soaked in. And we could be hurting again some day because of it.

kmh

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, June 26, the 177th day of 2013. There are 188 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On June 26, 1963, President John F. Kennedy visited West Berlin, where he delivered his famous speech expressing solidarity with the city's residents, declaring: "Ich bin ein Berliner" (I am a Berliner).

On this date: In 1483, Richard III began his reign as King of England (he was crowned the following month at Westminster Abbey).

In 1870, the first section of Atlantic City, N.J.'s Boardwalk was opened to the public.

In 1915, following a whirlwind courtship, poet T.S. Eliot married Vivienne Haigh-Wood in London. (The marriage proved disastrous, but the couple never divorced.)

In 1925, Charlie Chaplin's classic comedy "The Gold Rush" premiered at Grauman's Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood.

In 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was nominated for a second term of office by delegates to the Democratic national convention in Philadelphia.

In 1945, the charter of the United Nations was signed by 50 countries in San Francisco.

In 1948, the Berlin Airlift began in earnest after the Soviet Union cut off land and water routes to the isolated western sector of Berlin.

In 1950, President Harry S. Truman authorized the Air Force and Navy to enter the Korean conflict.

In 1973, former White House counsel John W. Dean told the Senate Watergate Committee about an "enemies list" kept by the Nixon White House.

In 1988, three people were killed when a new Airbus A320 jetliner carrying more than 130 people crashed into a forest during a demonstration at an air show in Mulhouse, France.

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush went back on his "no-new-taxes" campaign pledge, conceding that tax increases would have to be included in any deficit-reduction package worked out with congressional negotiators.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton announced the U.S. had launched missiles against Iraqi targets because of "compelling evidence" Iraq had plotted to assassinate former President George H.W. Bush. Baseball Hall-of-Famer Roy Campanella died in Woodland Hills, Calif., at age 71.

Ten years ago: The U.S. Supreme Court, in Lawrence v. Texas, struck down, 6-3, state bans on gay sex. A jury in Fort Worth, Texas, convicted former nurse's aide Chante Mallard of murder for hitting a homeless man, Gregory Biggs, with her car, driving home with his mangled body

FROM THE BIBLE

This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Matthew 3:17. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

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Why The GOP Can't Learn

BY ROBERT B. REICH
Tribune Media Services

It's as if they didn't learn a thing from the 2012 elections. Republicans are on the same suicide mission as before — trying to block immigration reform (if they can't scuttle it in the Senate, they're ready to in the House), roll back the clock on abortion rights (they're pushing federal and state legislation to ban abortions after the first 22 weeks) and stop gay marriage wherever possible.

As almost everyone knows by now, this puts them on the wrong side of history. America is becoming more ethnically diverse, women are gaining economic and political power, and young people are more socially libertarian than ever before.

Why can't Republicans learn? It's no answer to say their "base" — ever older, whiter, more rural and male — won't budge. The Democratic Party of the 1990s simply ignored its old base and became "New Democrats," spearheading the North American Free Trade Agreement (to the chagrin of organized labor), performance standards in classrooms (resisted by teachers' unions), and welfare reform and crime control (upsetting traditional liberals).

I wasn't particularly happy about all these moves, to tell you the truth. But they did at least give the Democratic Party a new lease on life, allowing it to achieve victories such as new investments in education and infrastructure, and the first comprehensive health-care law in American history.

You won't hear about "New Republicans" taking over the Republican Party because the GOP's base is far more entrenched than was the old Democratic base.

And its power is concentrated in mostly rural states — including most of the old Confederacy, the mountain states and Indiana — which together exert more of a chokehold on the Republican national party machinery than the old Democrats, spread widely but thinly over many states, exerted on the Democratic Party.

These Republican states are more homogenous and conspicuously less like the rest of America than the urbanized regions of the country that are growing more rapidly. Senators and representatives from these states naturally reflect the dominant views of their constituents — on immigration, abortion and



Robert REICH

gay marriage, as well as guns, marijuana, race and dozens of other salient issues. But these views are increasingly out of step with where most of the nation is heading.

This state-centered, relatively homogenous GOP structure effectively prevents the party from changing its stripes.

Despite all the post-election rhetoric about the necessity for change emanating from GOP leaders who aspire to the national stage, the national stage isn't really what the GOP is most interested in or attuned to. It's directed inward rather than outward, to its state constituents rather than to the nation.

This structure also blocks any would-be "New Republicans" such as New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie from gaining the kind of power inside the party that a New Democrat like Bill Clinton received in 1992. The only

way they'd be able to attract a following inside the party would be to commit themselves to policies they'd have to abandon immediately upon getting nominated, as Mitt Romney did with disastrous results.

It's true that by 1992 Democrats were far more desperate to win the presidency — having been in the wilderness for 12 years — than today's GOP appears to be. Nonetheless it's doubtful the GOP will be willing to eschew its old base even if it loses the presidency again in 2016, because without its collection of relatively homogenous states, there just isn't much of a GOP.

The greater likelihood is a steady eclipse of the Republican Party at the national level, even as it becomes more entrenched in particular states. Those states can be expected to become regressive islands of backwardness within a nation growing steadily more progressive.

The GOP's national role will be primarily negative — seeking to block, delay and filibuster measures that will eventually become the law of the land in any event, while simultaneously preaching "states' rights" and praying for conservative majorities on the Supreme Court.

In other words, more of the same.

Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of "Beyond Outrage," now available in paperback. He blogs at www.robertreich.org.

Deen's Excuses Just Don't Cut It

BY CURTIS TATE
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In the past week, many commenters have rushed to defend fallen Food Network star Paula Deen. But one excuse for her cluelessness about race really takes the cake: that she is "of another time."

The assumption that white Southerners of a certain age are unreformed racists living in a secret antebellum fantasy is getting older than egg custard in the noonday sun.

Older white Southern folk, so the narrative goes, are dim-witted, Confederate flag-waving bigots incapable of walking a mile in the shoes of their long-oppressed fellow citizens and understanding the pain of their history. And Lord help them, they just can't change — a "lost cause," of sorts.

Forget about these condescending stereotypes. Let's consider another perspective: my dad's.

My father and Paula Deen are Southerners of the same generation. She was born in 1947 in Georgia. He was born in 1949 in Mississippi. They both grew up late in the Jim Crow era.

Violent racism wasn't all in the past for him — it was still happening during his youth.

My dad was in grade school when 14-year-old Emmett Till was beaten to death in Money, Miss. He was in high school when three young civil rights workers, two white and one black, were abducted and killed in Philadelphia, Miss. He was a student at the University of Mississippi — Ole Miss, integrated only a few years before — when Martin Luther King was shot in Memphis.

Maybe some white Southerners looked the other way or said the troublemakers had it coming. My dad wasn't one of them.

If theories about white Southerners of my dad's generation were true, he would have inherited the racial attitudes prevalent in earlier generations. And my sister and I might have heard language similar to what Paula Deen's children apparently heard from her.

I can assure you, we didn't. My dad's parents and grandparents came from generations for whom segregation was embedded into the Southern social structure. His grandmother, my great-grandmother, was born in north Alabama in 1882, less than two decades after the Civil War. In her 95 years, she lived from the beginning of the Jim Crow era through the civil rights era. If anyone could be described as a product of her time, it would be her.

Yet my great-grandmother, who grew up without electricity, running water or the automobile, profoundly influenced my dad. With only a grade-school education, she instilled in him a love of reading and a passion for history — which he would go on to teach for nearly four decades. Without the slightest hesitation, she accepted my mother, who grew up in Vietnam and came to America only a few years earlier.

We might forgive someone born in the 1880s for coming from a different place — but two or three generations later, the world had changed.

My dad came of age at a time when the South could no longer look the other way — the past had finally caught up. He came to terms with it. Let's stop making excuses for Paula Deen or anyone else.

Curtis Tate is a reporter with the McClatchy Washington Bureau. Readers may email him at ctate@mcclatchydc.com.

YOUR LETTERS

Thank You, Yankton

Randy Abbink, Scotland

I would like to thank everyone for my time working in Yankton. I happily worked at Hy-Vee for the past 12 years and enjoyed everything about it. I have met, worked with, and

visited with many great people over that time. I have accepted a different job in another town, but I feel that the past 12 years have prepared me for any challenge I will face. My family and I thank everyone for all that they have done.