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OPINION OTHER VIEWS

Neb. On 'The Right Side Of History'

LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR (May 28): Nebraska's lawmakers made history Wednesday, repealing the death penalty in a vote that will reverberate across the country.

The 30-19 vote on the motion by Sen. Ernie Chambers to override a veto by Gov. Pete Ricketts made clear the issue is no longer one with a clear partisan divide.

Throughout three rounds of voting and on the override there was a solid group of conservative Republicans who supported replacing the death penalty with a sentence of life in prison without parole.

In the end more Republican state senators voted for repeal than the 13 Democrats in the nonpartisan Legislature.

In the days leading up to the climactic vote, Chambers declared that "when something is of truly historic significance, it is not because of one individual or one act."

Chambers is right about that. But it's also true that in Nebraska there is no single individual who has done more than Chambers to force Nebraskans in and out of the legislative chamber to examine their conscience and rationale on the death penalty.

The veto override came on his 38th attempt to replace the death penalty with a sentence of life in prison without parole, according to the legislative research office.

Chambers was quick to credit the group of conservative state senators. They were vocal, articulate and unflinching. One of the most active was Sen. Colby Coash of Lincoln, a one-time supporter of the death penalty. Among Coash's efforts was a statement signed by 13 Republican state senators supporting Sen. Mike Gloor after he was attacked politically for supporting repeal.

The growing conservative support for repealing the death penalty was not lost on Nebraskans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, which has advocated for repeal for decades. In 2012 it launched Nebraska Conservatives Concerned About The Death Penalty, a chapter in a national movement.

On that group's website is a quote from Coash that summarizes the conservative argument against the death penalty: "Conservatives know that government is imperfect and makes mistakes. My desire to protect innocent life leads me to worry about a fallible system that has the power to take a life. If this (the death penalty) were any other government program, we would have got rid of it a long time ago."

There's little doubt that there is momentum in favor of abolishing the death penalty. Six states have now eliminated the death penalty since 2007, and the number of executions and death penalty sentences is at a 20-year low.

In fact there has been majority support in the Legislature for years, but opponents have been able to dead-end the effort with filibusters. The Legislature's rules now will work against senators who want to reinstate the death penalty, especially with Chambers, dean of the Legislature and master of the rules, there to thwart such efforts.

Supporters of the death penalty say they will collect signatures put the issue on the ballot. The task of reversing the Legislature's vote may prove more difficult than they imagine. Support for the death penalty is not as deep and committed as zealots would like to believe, and the arguments for abolishment are strong.

As Chambers put it, repeal of the death penalty "puts Nebraska on the right side of history."

IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Monday, June 8, the 159th day of 2015. There are 206 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On June 8, 1915, U.S. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan resigned over what he viewed as President Woodrow Wilson's overly belligerent attitude toward Germany following the sinking of the RMS Lusitania.

On this date: In A.D. 632, the prophet Muhammad died in Medina.

In 1845, Andrew Jackson, seventh president of the United States, died in Nashville, Tennessee.

In 1864, Abraham Lincoln was nominated for another term as president during the National Union (Republican) Party's convention in Baltimore.

In 1912, the ballet "Daphnis et Chloe" was premiered by the Ballets Russes in Paris.

In 1948, the "Texaco Star Theater" made its debut on NBC-TV with Milton Berle guest-hosting the first program. (Berle was later named the show's permanent host.)

In 1953, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that restaurants in the District of Columbia could not refuse to serve blacks. Eight tornadoes struck Michigan's Lower Peninsula, killing 126 people.

In 1967, 34 U.S. servicemen were killed when Israel attacked the USS Liberty, a Navy intelligence-gathering ship in the Mediterranean. (Israel later said the Liberty had been mistaken for an Egyptian vessel.)

In 1972, during the Vietnam War, an Associated Press photographer captured the image of 9-year-old Phan Thi Kim Phuc as she ran naked and severely burned from the scene of a South Vietnamese napalm attack.

In 1978, a jury in Clark County, Nevada, ruled the so-called "Mormon will," purportedly written by the late billionaire Howard Hughes, was a forgery.

In 1982, President Ronald Reagan became the first American chief executive to address a joint session of the British Parliament.

In 1987, Fawn Hall began testifying at the Iran-Contra hearings, describing how, as secretary to National Security aide Oliver L. North, she helped to shred some documents and spirit away others.

In 1995, U.S. Marines rescued Capt. Scott O'Grady, whose F-16C fighter jet had been shot down by Bosnian Serbs on June 2. Mickey Mantle received a liver transplant at a Dallas hospital; however, the baseball great died two months later.

Ten years ago: The Senate confirmed California judge Janice Rogers Brown for the federal appeals court, ending a two-year battle. Former Boston Bruins star Cam Neely, the late Valeri Kharlamov and Murray Costello were named to the Hockey Hall of Fame.

Five years ago: In several high-profile Republican primaries, Meg Whitman won

the nomination for California governor while Carly Fiorina got the nod to oppose three-term Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer; in Nevada, Sharron Angle won the right to oppose Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. (All three ended up losing their respective contests.) In South Carolina, political unknown Alvin Greene won the Democratic primary to challenge U.S. Sen. Jim DeMint (Greene lost in November).

One year ago: Gunmen stormed an airport terminal in Karachi, Pakistan, in an attack that left at least 29 people dead, including the assailants (the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility). A married couple shot and killed two Las Vegas police officers and an armed bystander who attempted to intervene; the couple then took their own lives. Pope Francis welcomed the Israeli and Palestinian presidents to the Vatican for a remarkable evening of peace prayers. Rafael Nadal won the French Open title for the ninth time, and the fifth time in a row, by beating Novak Djokovic 3-6, 7-5, 6-2, 6-4. "A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder" won the Tony Award for best musical; "All the Way" was crowned best play. Miss Nevada Nia Sanchez was crowned Miss USA.

Today's Birthdays: Former first lady Barbara Bush is 90. Actor-comedian Jerry Stiller is 88. Actress Millicent Martin is 81. Actor James Darren is 79. Actor Bernie Casey is 76. Singer Nancy Sinatra is 75. Singer Chuck Negron is 73. Musician Boz Scaggs is 71. Author Sara Paretsky is 68. Actress Sonia Braga is 65. Actress Kathy Baker is 65. Country musician Tony Rice is 64. Rock singer Bonnie Tyler is 64. Actor Griffin Dunne is 60. "Dilbert" creator Scott Adams is 58. Actor-director Keenen Ivory Wayans is 57. Singer Mick Hucknall (Simply Red) is 55. Musician Nick Rhodes (Duran Duran) is 53. Rhythm-and-blues singer Doris Pearson (Five Star) is 49. Actress Julianna Margulies is 48. Actor Dan Futterman is 48. Actor David Sutcliffe is 46. Actor Kent Faulcon is 45. Rhythm-and-blues singer Nicci Gilbert is 45. Actress Kelli Williams is 45. Former U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, D-Ariz., is 45. Actor Mark Feuerstein is 44. Contemporary Christian musician Mike Scheuchzer (MercyMe) is 40. Actor Eion Bailey is 39. Tennis player Lindsay Davenport is 39. Rapper Kanye West is 38. TV personality/actress Maria Menounos is 37. Country singer/songwriter Sturgill Simpson is 37. Blues-rock musician Derek Trucks (The Derek Trucks Band) is 36. Rock singer Alex Band (The Calling) is 34. Folk-bluegrass singer-musician Sara Watkins (Nickel Creek) is 34. Tennis player Kim Clijsters is 32. Actress Torrey DeVitto is 31.

Thought for Today: "Don't talk about what you have done or what you are going to do." — President Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826).

FROM THE BIBLE

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. 1 Peter 2:9. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Promotional Fail

David Ganje, Rapid City
South Dakota government is seeking to colonize the state with Star-Trekkers? "Why die on Mars when you can live in South Dakota?" This is the new slogan for South Dakota's advertising campaign to attract people and businesses to the state.

The commissioner of Economic Development said, "Our goal is to build brand awareness of South Dakota." If this is a branding effort, then they are branding the wrong side of the horse.

By this new video promotion, the Commissioner wishes to re-direct space travelers who have otherwise

been preregistering for a one-way trip to the red planet. The commissioner has picked an interesting demographic.

This is boosterism gone spatial. How does saying "We are better than Mars" promote state development? One news article suggested these successful Martian voyagers will be reality TV stars. The Commissioner is focusing on this interesting selection pool to add to the residency of the state. His pool of prospective residents consists of mars-traveling aspirants whom the commissioner asks change their celestial minds, or what they have of a mind, and reconsider their goals in favor of living in South Dakota. Is the actual goal of the commissioner to acquire pool of responsible future political

leaders for the state?

The advertising budget would better be used to repatriate some of the state's political leaders and government officials; they could be colonized to Wyoming and experience an actual taste of the Mars landscape. Yes, the state is closer than Mars for those looking to relocate, but I wonder how far from ground earth is the residency of the alien ad writer.

The state's promotion tells one that South Dakota is abundant in oxygen. While I know that to be true, I do not know what the ad writer was breathing. Offering sanctuary to Star-Trekkers is a rather obtuse way of promoting state development.



Capitol Notebook

Summers Are Busy Time For High School Athletes

BY BOB MERCER

State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — The parents of high school athletes in South Dakota know summers aren't time off. Regular classes are out, and interscholastic athletic events aren't scheduled. Instead, the months of June and July are time for athletes to train for next season.

In fact, the South Dakota High School Activities Association has a set of specific out of season regulations governing what coaches can do and can't do, during the period from completion of the state track and field meet until midnight on July 31.

Coaches are limited to four team camps or tournaments, or two team camps or tournaments and one league. A team camp or tournament can run five consecutive days. A league can play once per week.

But coaches aren't limited on individual contacts with a player, and they are allowed to provide private lessons to players where specific techniques and fundamentals are taught.

The private lessons can be given in small groups that are limited in size, depending on the sport. Coaches are allowed to play in the same league as a player, but they aren't allowed to play on the same team with a player.

Now the SDHSAA board of directors is considering a major change in the out-of-season rule.

The directors will decide at their next meeting June 9 whether to eliminate all of the regulations regarding individual contacts and private lessons. The change would basically erase everything but the restriction on numbers of team contacts.

Nearly all of the athletic directors at the high schools in the state association favored the change when the athletic directors discussed it

at their group's meeting earlier this year. The proposal contains one other important piece: Coaches couldn't have any contact with players during the week of July 1 through July 7 each summer.

These changes would take effect for the 2016 summer.

The changes would simplify life for coaches. Some critics fear overload if players face a full summer of being openly coached every day (other than the July 4 holiday week).

This brings up a related issue: Time conflicts with summer sports that aren't under the SDHSAA umbrella. Swimming is one. VFW and American Legion baseball activities are another.

The baseball situation has become complicated with the creation of spring high school baseball as an independent activity.

We now have high school-affiliated teams playing a spring schedule for a state championship. We also have the traditional American Legion teams playing a summer schedule for a state championship.

Some communities have baseball teams that play both.

But there are situations where American Legion players are prohibited or discouraged by their team's rules or coaches from playing on the local high school team.

And there are players who compete on the high school baseball team in the spring but don't play on the local American Legion team in the summer. That allows them to train in June and July for their other high school sports.

Setting summer high school seasons covering June and July for baseball and for boys and girls golf, whose state tournaments at times run into difficult weather whether spring or fall, might be a practical next step.



Bob MERCER

Limbaugh Finds Out He's Not Normal, And It Scares Him

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.

Tribune Content Agency

I am not normal.

This, I learned from a news story 35 years ago. The details have faded with the passage of time, but the gist of it remains clear. Some expert had crunched a bunch of numbers in search of the "average" human being, the planetary norm, and found that she was an 8-year-old Japanese girl, living in Tokyo. I don't fit that profile; I'm willing to bet you don't, either. So as a matter of statistical fact, I'm not "normal" and neither are you.

I've always found that story a useful corrective whenever I am tempted to declaim too haughtily on what is or isn't normal. I offer it now to Rush Limbaugh in the vain hope it will help him rethink his assault last week on the woman who used to be Bruce Jenner. Granted, the story was about planetary norms and Limbaugh was ranting about American social norms, but the principle still applies.

As you doubtless know, Jenner's transformation into a woman named Caitlyn has been quite controversial. She has been praised for her "courage" by President Obama and called "brave" by Ellen DeGeneres. At the other extreme, one David French, blogging for the *National Review*, dismissed her as a "surgically damaged man," while a Matt Walsh on Glenn Beck's website, *The Blaze*, called her a "mentally disordered man."

And we have recently learned that, back in February, Mike Huckabee cracked about wishing he could have identified as female when he was in school so he could have showered with the girls. As inadvertently revealing as that "joke" feels, it is Limbaugh's response that really helps us understand why those who are threatened by, and viscerally angry about, Jenner's transformation, feel as they do.

As Caitlyn made her debut on the cover of *Vanity Fair*, the talk show host fumed that Republicans should reject her, even though she identifies with the, ahem, big tent party. Liberals, he complained, are trying to "redefine normalcy." He went on to say that nowadays, "conservatives

and Republicans are the new weirdos, the new kooks, and that is part of the political objective here, in normalizing all of this really marginal behavior. I mean, if less than 1 percent of the population is engaging in it, it's marginalized behavior; it isn't normal."

One might argue, citing Miles Davis, Steve Jobs, Rosa Parks, Stan Lee, Sally Ride, Muhammad Ali, Elvis Presley, and a thousand other rule-breakers and innovators, that "normal" is overrated. But put that aside, take Limbaugh at his word, and the fear undergirding his complaint becomes plain. He and those like him look at Caitlyn Jenner and wonder: "If this is normal, what does that make me?"

It's worth noting, in light of Limbaugh's fears, that the country's opinions on social issues like this are shifting, and not in his direction. Gallup recently reported that America is moving sharply left on the moral acceptability of everything from gay rights to stem cell research. I'm aware of no polling on Jenner's transformation, but who would be surprised to find that there is widespread approval?

Not that freedom should be a popularity contest (most of us agree now that Jim Crow is wrong, but it was also wrong back when much of the country thought it was right), but it is better to have the wind behind you than against you. Ask Limbaugh, who now finds himself pushing against that wind and finding that the only "marginal behavior" here is his. That must be chilling to a man so obsessed with defining and defending "normalcy." He should get used to it.

Because these days, what isn't normal is the small-minded need to stigmatize those who walk a different path through life. What isn't normal is the bigot's siren call to our basest and most baseless fears. What isn't normal is hatred and terror of the new.

Poor Rush. It turns out that what isn't "normal," is him.

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.



Leonard PITTS