



We're Free To Be Stupid

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.
Tribune Media Services

Perhaps you remember when Dr. Doom conquered the world.

Or perhaps you don't. Sadly enough, even in this day and age, not everyone is comic book literate.

Suffice it to say, then, that back in the '80s, Marvel Comics published a graphic novel in which the villainous Victor von Doom achieved his dearest goal: to rule the world. And he made it a better place, too. Famine ended, the stock market climbed, crime fell, occupying armies withdrew, racial oppression vanished. Doom turned the planet into a paradise and the only cost of his beneficence was free will. He created a device that took away the ability of human beings to decide for themselves.

When the Avengers defeated him, the world returned to rack and ruin as humanity reassessed its right to be as bleeped up as it wanted to be. The Avenger Hawkeye wondered aloud if they had done the right thing. Whereupon Captain America admonished him, "The world isn't perfect. ... But people are free to make their own choices — and that's the way it should be."

He could have been talking to Michael Bloomberg. The emperor — beg pardon, the mayor — of New York City was defeated Monday, not by the Avengers, but by a State Supreme Court judge, Milton Tingling, who struck down Bloomberg's ban on the sale of extra large, non-diet soft drinks. Justice Tingling, though not known to possess superpowers, nevertheless zapped the forces of overreach. "Arbitrary and capricious," he called the restrictions, which would have taken effect Tuesday.

But Bloomberg's ban was more than that. It was the very definition of liberalism run amok, a good idea (people should limit their intake of sugary soft drinks) driven headlong into the weeds of overkill, overregulation and basic preposterousness. The resemblance to conservative extremism and its resort to unwieldy laws to govern behaviors it disapproves (did someone say transvaginal ultrasound?), is doubtless unintended, but no less real even so.



Leonard PITTS

Apparently, if you send two people venturing out, one to the extreme left, and the other to the extreme right, of our political spectrum, they will end up face to face. Because the distinguishing characteristic of extreme liberalism or extreme conservatism is the extremism; itself, the fact that some people just don't know when to quit.

Obviously, the state is sometimes obliged to impose restrictions. One shouldn't be allowed to sell Camels to kindergartners. Or do 90 on a residential street. Or discriminate by race, creed, gender, condition or sexual orientation.

But there is a difference between those restrictions the state imposes to protect the health, welfare and property of those around us from us or defend the vulnerable from exploitation and those the state imposes to regulate behavior that is simply unwise. The latter reflects a lack of faith in the wisdom of people, their ability, when properly informed, to make the right choice.

Yes, obesity is a crisis impacting our health, our economy and even, some have argued, our national security. We are a lard butt nation waddling toward demise. Got it.

Yet, if Americans kicked their cigarette addiction by a public campaign that educated them to the dangers thereof, what reason do we have to believe they would not be able to kick sugary soft drinks by the same means? None.

So Bloomberg is wrong, and Captain America was right. If one is not free to make one's own bad or stupid decisions, then one is not free. It is an abiding truth of which we seem to need constant reminders.

Perhaps you remember the axiom about eternal vigilance being the price of freedom. If so, you will not be surprised to hear that Dr. Doom, as he escaped, said he was only defeated "for now." Or that Mayor Bloomberg has vowed to appeal.

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Writer's Block

When The Iraq War Really Hit Home

BY EMILY NIEBRUGGE
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My cousin, Robert, was joining the Army.
That's when the Iraq War became real to me.

Until then, my life had been pretty normal. I'd leave school every day to walk to my grandmother's house, and sit next to her in the recliner. She'd ask me how my day had been, and I'd tell her what I learned in school.

Then that one day, in fifth grade, it was different. She told me Robert was joining the Army and would most likely be deployed.

It wasn't that I didn't know about the war or the events of 9/11, but things were pretty fuzzy as far as what was happening in Iraq, where we went to war in 2003.

I heard things at school, and I heard my older family members talk about the reason why we were going to war in Iraq, but I don't think I ever really understood what was going on — especially politically.

But that was different. That was distant. This was real — it was close.

At this point in my life, all I knew was the United States was in a "war," but more importantly I was worried about the well-being of my family.

I was attending Yankton's Sacred Heart School, and while the war was going on, many classes, including mine, started writing letters to the soldiers.

My teacher told us we could be randomly assigned the soldiers to write to or we could write to someone we knew currently serving overseas. Of course, I wanted to write to my cousin.

I had always thought of Robert as the cool, older

family member. There are 10 years between us, so we weren't friends in the sense that we hung out with each other and talked all the time. He always lived a few states away and he was quite a bit older than me.



Emily NIEBRUGGE

But once I started writing him he always took the time to write me back. That's when we really got to know each other.

Another friend in my class chose to write to Robert as well. Years later, Robert told me those letters made things so much better. He was so grateful for something I had no idea could make that much of a difference.

Because my class baked cookies once a month to sell to the elementary and middle school, I also started sending him two dozen cookies almost every time we made them. Although they were crumbs by the time they were shipped across the world, I still think he liked getting them.

This is what I knew. I didn't understand the political frenzy occurring, the amount of money it cost the country to be at war or how long this national commitment would last.

Most people see a country's hardship, pain and suffering when they think of the war in Iraq. I'm now 20 years old and a sophomore at the University of South Dakota, so I understand now why that is.

But I can't help but take something positive away from the war.

The war gave me the chance to reach out to my cousin the only way I knew how. And we're great friends now. I truly believe it was because of the decision to write him 10 years ago.

Niebrugge is a part-time sports writer for the Press & Dakotan.

should the Congress and everyone between the president and the Congress go to jail!

The government gets paid more every year to keep us in debt.

The president's platform for his first term was for the government to take a cut in pay if they can't get us out of debt! It never happened and we voted him back in to be the president again!

The Press & Dakotan

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Filibuster Puts Light On Drone Policy

HOUSTON CHRONICLE (March 10): There was a sense of a Senate returning to form as Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., munched on a Kit Kat bar in the middle of his 13-hour filibuster — a break from his reading articles about military drones. This grandstanding didn't stop the confirmation of John Brennan as CIA director, unlike the silent holds that have blocked qualified candidates from filling the holes in our judiciary.

Now it is time to turn that rhetorical passion into legislative action. If Paul and his acolytes are serious about restraining executive authority, then they should set their targets on the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists. Passed after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, the AUMF granted the president authority to use all necessary force against those who planned, authorized committed or aided in the 9/11 attacks or those who harbored them. Since then, it has been used to justify military force not just in Afghanistan, but Pakistan and Yemen. And against U.S. citizens. Without any explicit restrictions, folks outside the White House are left wondering whether Congress authorized the president to use military force anywhere that could possibly house al-Qaida sympathizers. Legislative history implies that Congress specifically did not include authority within our national borders, but we shouldn't have to guess at whether the president can kill citizens on domestic soil.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz has joined Paul in introducing a bill to prohibit drone killings of citizens on U.S. soil if they don't represent an imminent threat. But why not look at the AUMF itself? When contemplating presidential authority, we hope that Democrats always imagine a President Dick Cheney. And for Republicans, well, President Barack Obama seems to foster enough healthy skepticism. But for too long both parties have cared more about partisan politics than the ramifications of unchecked presidential power. We hope Paul's filibuster will help bring an end to that era.

Waiting On North Korea

TEXARKANA (Ark.) GAZETTE (March 10): Let's not hold our breath over the latest United Nations sanctions against North Korea for pursuing nuclear weapons capability. We will turn blue and pass out long before the megalomaniacs running the rogue nation give up their nuclear ambitions.

Many believe the latest round of sanctions only will aid Kim Jong Un's propaganda machine by shoring up nationalist fervor. The latest sanctions will affect only the North Korean elite class. The majority of North Koreans already live in abject poverty and have been hit hardest by previous sanctions.

The newest Security Council punishment cracks down on the sale of luxury items. ...

The ruling class that will be hit by these latest sanctions lacks the numbers — most likely the guts — to mount much of a protest.

So Kim Jong Un, like his late father, Kim Jong Il, will bluster about the UN being controlled by the U.S. which, North Koreans believe, bullies the smaller nation. Even as their stomachs rumble and they lack medical aid, North Korea's masses embrace nationalism in this David and Goliath scenario. They will consider their nation at war. ...

The world's diplomatic options are limited, but there is one flicker of hope — although it rests with a nation we cannot exactly call an ally.

North Korea's rulers have managed to carry on despite previous sanctions because China has skirted the crackdowns and provided oil and food. That has kept the country going through famine, disasters and the biggest disaster of all, poor leadership. ...

North Korea will continue its slow, steady efforts to arm itself with nukes. We only hope China's disenchantment with the leadership there steadily and swiftly grows.

SPEAK OUT!

Share your thoughts with us. Write to the **PRESS & DAKOTAN** on a topic of the day or in response to an editorial or story. Write us at: Letters, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078, drop off at 319 Walnut in Yankton, fax to 665-1721 or email to views@yankton.net.

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, March 14, the 73rd day of 2013. There are 292 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On March 14, 1923, President Warren G. Harding became the first chief executive to file an income tax return, paying a tax of \$17,990 on his \$75,000 salary.

On this date: In 1743, a memorial service was held at Faneuil Hall in Boston honoring Peter Faneuil, who had donated the building bearing his name.

In 1794, Eli Whitney received a patent for his cotton gin, an invention that revolutionized America's cotton industry.

In 1885, the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera "The Mikado" premiered at the Savoy Theatre in London.

In 1900, Congress ratified the Gold Standard Act.

In 1932, photography pioneer George Eastman, founder of Eastman Kodak Co., died by his own hand at age 77 in Rochester, N.Y.

In 1939, the republic of Czechoslovakia was dissolved, opening the way for Nazi occupation of Czech areas and the separation of Slovakia.

In 1951, during the Korean War, United Nations forces recaptured Seoul.

In 1962, Democrat Edward M. Kennedy officially launched in Boston his successful candidacy for the U.S. Senate seat from Massachusetts once held by his brother, President John F. Kennedy. (Edward Kennedy served in the Senate for nearly 47 years.)

In 1964, a jury in Dallas found Jack Ruby guilty of murdering Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President John F. Kennedy, and sentenced him to death. (Both the conviction and death sentence were later overturned, but Ruby died before he could be retried.)

In 1967, the body of President John F. Kennedy was moved from a temporary grave to a permanent memorial site at Arlington National Cemetery.

In 1980, a LOT Polish Airlines jet crashed while attempting to land in Warsaw, killing all 87 people aboard, including 22 members of a U.S. amateur boxing team.

In 1991, a British court overturned the wrongful convictions of the "Birmingham Six," who had spent 16 years in prison for a 1974 Irish Republican Army bombing, and ordered their release.

Ten years ago: Actor Robert Blake was released from jail on \$1.5 million bail, 11 months after he was arrested on

charges of murdering his wife, Bonny Lee Bakley. (Blake was later acquitted at trial.) Christopher Boyce, whose Cold War spying was immortalized on film in "The Falcon and the Snowman," was released from a halfway house in San Francisco after about a quarter-century in prison.

Five years ago: Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama denounced inflammatory remarks from his pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright. Protests led by Buddhist monks in Tibet turned violent, leading to an extensive crackdown by China's military. A tornado ripped into the Georgia Dome during the Southeastern Conference tournament, sending debris tumbling from the ceiling and prompting fans to flee. Lindsey Vonn completed the first American sweep of the overall World Cup titles in 25 years, a day after Bode Miller won his second overall crown in Bormio, Italy.

One year ago: President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, hosted a White House state dinner for British Prime Minister David Cameron and his wife, Samantha. Earlier, the two leaders announced that NATO forces would hand over the lead combat role in Afghanistan to Afghan forces in 2013 as the U.S. and its allies aimed to get out by the end of 2014.

Today's Birthdays: Former astronaut Frank Borman is 85. Singer Phil Phillips is 82. Actor Michael Caine is 80. Composer-conductor Quincy Jones is 80. Former astronaut Eugene Cernan is 79. Actor Raymond J. Barry is 74. Movie director Wolfgang Petersen is 72. Country singer Michael Martin Murphey is 68. Rock musician Walt Parazalder (Chicago) is 68. Actor Steve Kanaly is 67. Comedian Billy Crystal is 65. Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., is 65. Country singer Jann Browne is 59. Actor Adrian Zmed is 59. Prince Albert II, the ruler of Monaco, is 55. Actress Laila Robins is 54. Actress Tamara Tunie is 54. Actress Penny Johnson Jerald is 52. Producer-director-writer Kevin Williamson is 48. Actor Gary Anthony Williams is 47. Actress Megan Follows is 45. Rock musician Michael Bland is 44. Country singer Kristian Bush is 43. Rock musician Derrick (Jimmie's Chicken Shack) is 41. Actress Betsy Brandt is 40. Actress Grace Park is 39. Actor Jake Fogelnest is 34. Actor Chris Klein is 34. Actress Kate Maberly is 31. Singer-musician Taylor Hanson (Hanson) is 30. Actor Jamie Bell is 27.

Thought for Today: "The man who does his work, any work, conscientiously, must always be in one sense a great man." — Dinah Maria Mulock Craik, English novelist (1826-1887).

FROM THE BIBLE

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Matthew 19:26. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

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