



# Wanted: A Real Human Voice

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.  
Tribune Media Services

Dear Whomever is in Charge of Customer Service for DirecTV:

All I wanted was to watch the game. I was back in my hotel room after a long day and I figured, what better way to unwind? Now, the game wasn't available on the hotel channels, but I've got that League Pass service you offer and one of its perks — supposedly — is that you can watch the game right on the ol' iPad.

So I got out the ol' iPad and I fired up the app and I retrieved the password and I tried to sign in and nothing happened, so I called you guys and the robot lady answered and told me to OPRIMA NUMERO DOS if I wanted to conduct my business in Spanish, which I didn't, so I didn't and I said yes when the robot lady asked if I was a subscriber and I gave her my phone number when she asked for it and then she asked me to tell her what I wanted, and I tried to explain twice but she didn't get it, so I told her I had a question about League Pass and she gave me this long spiel about how I could buy League Pass, which I didn't need to do, since I already had it, so I asked the robot lady to connect me with technical support and she said she would and that's about when she hung up on me, so I called again and I went through the whole thing again and this time I got to a human being who listened to my problem and what I had done to solve it, expressed remorse, then told me to do the same things I had done, which had not worked the first time, and when I did and it didn't work again, this person transferred me to another person who also expressed remorse and then, reading from a manual, told me to do the thing I had done, which hadn't worked the first two times, and when I explained this, transferred me to a third person who dutifully expressed remorse and quickly concluded he could not help me and told me to contact the NBA.

By this point, the game was at halftime. I gave up. So anyway, Mr. or Ms. Whomever is in Charge, here's the thing: Can I talk to a human being next time? I'll pay



Leonard PITTS

extra if you simply have the phone answered by someone with a pulse.

Not just you. I make the same offer to my cellphone company, my Internet provider, the electric company and the bank. I am willing to pay more if it means that when I call your company, my call will be answered by an actual, knowledgeable human being who will listen to my problem and solve it.

That doesn't seem much to ask. Once upon a time, it wasn't. But that was before technology made our lives simpler and more convenient. It was before the age turned distant and impersonal and human beings became cost inefficient. It was before someone got the bright idea to let robots answer the phone.

Meaning not just machines that use voice recognition software to misunderstand what you're asking for and route your call to the wrong department, but also those human robots who, once they do get your call, read mechanically from a script that requires them to express remorse for your problem, explain why they can't fix your problem, try to "up sell" you on some new service that does not

address your problem, then ask if you are satisfied with how they have resolved your problem.

Those old movies that told us how machines would take over the world had it wrong. One does not see human skulls crushed beneath robot feet. No, one just sees human spirit crushed beneath robot customer service. One misses the days when companies employed actual people to serve actual people and if they were occasionally surly, clueless or unhelpful, they were at least real — capable of acknowledging your presence.

How much to get that back? Seriously. You could market it as a premium package. DirecTV Pulse — Now With Real Humans!

Give me a call and let's discuss. Press 3 for English.

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## Writer's Block

# Will Congress Ever Face The Facts?

BY WILLIAM KERR  
For the Press & Dakotan

I have really begun to worry about our Congress ever facing the facts of our current economic situation.

To be fair, we are not the only rich country with that problem. Take a look at Britain through the eyes of *The Economist*, one of the leading, if not the leading, British magazines: "Britain is barely bumping along. The Bank of England reckons output, which peaked at 1.5 trillion pounds (\$3 trillion) in 2007, will not reach that level in real terms until 2015. With an ill wind the country could easily lose a decade. Meagre wages and stubborn inflation are eroding spending power. The pound is falling, yet the balance of trade is dismal. Pessimism is calcifying. Twelve percent of Britons expect their household finances to improve next year, and 52 percent think they will worsen. ... Debt has risen from 600 billion pounds (\$1.2 billion) in 2008 to 1.1 trillion pounds (\$2.2 trillion) now."

Well, does that sound familiar? And they think they have debt problems! What is ours now: \$16 trillion, or more?

In an earlier issue, *The Economist* said that America should not be doing what the British are doing. Apparently the British Houses of Commons and Lords are being as immobile as our Congress in dealing with their economy successfully.

Now for the facts:

- Seventy percent of our economy is provided by our consumers — that means all of us who live in this country. When many millions of us are unemployed, underemployed and low-paid consumption plummets and our economy staggers.

- In all of our recessions, including the "Great Depression" of 1929, the richest 1 percent have been unable to come near spending enough to offset the spending loss of the millions of unemployed, underemployed and low-paid workers (minimum wage workers especially) in our country. Therefore we have slow recoveries, and with the huge debt burden we also have, that could easily be



William KERR

seen as "an ill wind" (much of it from bailing out the financial community which caused most, if not all, of our recessions) — we might be facing a decade of snail-speed growth if our Congress continues doing little to help our economy grow.

- To raise the minimum wage to \$12 would be a huge immediate boost to the economy without costing the U.S. government a penny. It would even provide some additional income tax revenue from all of those increased wages which could be used for regular payments on our national debt, or even payments on the debt of some \$2.6 trillion that our Congress has "borrowed" from the Social Security Trust Fund (soon to be needed for the increase in retirees) to offset reduction of taxes for the rich. So, \$12 per hour would bring workers wages up to where they would parallel the increased cost of living since 1968 when workers wages last kept up with the increased basic cost of living.

- All of the other rich countries of the world have found that they cannot function with less than a 50 percent to 70 percent top bracket for income taxes. Ours is now what 35 percent? And even at the other rich countries' levels, most are still in severe financial trouble. When I was in high school, our top bracket was 90 percent! And we really had prosperity for all. We have to raise taxes on the rich considerably above 35 percent just to get by, let alone create a little surplus for safety.

- Maybe we also need to not only regulate banks more stringently, but also limit the size of them so they cannot become "too big to be allowed to fail."

None of these things will be accomplished as long as the 1 percent are allowed to "donate" as much as they want to the election campaigns of our representatives and president and thereby control how they vote. We voters need to pay more attention and un-elect those of our representatives who do not do what is "the will of the people" (their constitutional obligation) when they do not do what we want. We also need to keep better informed about what has worked out best for all in the past.

and relentless insistence on excellence. Here in South Dakota, sequester means 375 fewer children in our district can be served by Head Start and Early Head Start.

Head Start and other non-defense discretionary programs — at 3.4 percent of the budget — are not the cause of our growing debt. Congress needs to act quickly to restore fiscal stability and maintain funding for South Dakota's at-risk children. Our nation's budget simply can not be balanced on the backs of poor children.

It is vital that we keep the Head Start Program going. Our children are our future. It is our responsibility as parents and educators to give our children the best education possible. It has been proven that the most crucial learning time in a child's life is between the ages 1-5 years old. By eliminating the Head Start Program we will be missing the opportunity to help our children excel in their education. We need to help our children and future move forward, not backwards.

# THE PRESS & DAKOTAN

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## OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

# Obama In Israel: Words And Actions

ARAB NEWS, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (March 22): Lip readers have been able to understand the private words exchanged between politicians in sight of the television cameras, but out of range of microphones. If only there were mind readers who, just as easily, could work out what was going on inside President Barack Obama's head, on his visit the West Bank.

What for instance did he think, when he read the banner hung outside the Bab Al Shams Palestinian protest camp in Jerusalem "Obama: you promised hope and change, you gave us Colonies and Apartheid"? Did he reflect on the four wasted years of his first term, during which the extraordinary hopes raised in the Arab world by his seemingly ground-breaking Cairo speech, were dashed utterly? Did he consider how Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu had deployed the U.S. Zionist lobby to spin a new web of influence and deceit around Capitol Hill and the White House, so ensuring that even if America's extreme economic woes had allowed him the time to focus on the Palestinian issue, he would have found himself imprisoned?

To reiterate that Israel has "no greater friend" than the United States may have been obligatory but there was a caveat that hovered after this statement, which unfortunately remained unspoken. Obama could have gone on to say that sometimes, even good friends had to accept "tough love," to take on board advice that they would rather not hear from their buddies. Maybe the president gave that advice to Netanyahu in private, but most in the Arab world will not be holding their breath. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas of course will have given his American guest a warm welcome, but Obama can have been left in no doubt that most Palestinians have lost virtually all faith in his willingness, to say nothing of his ability, to put the peace process back on track and drive negotiations toward a just and lasting two-state solution. ...

Obama... now has four more years to substitute fine words with real action.

# Sexual Abuse In The Military

LOVELAND (Colo.) DAILY REPORTER-HERALD (March 21): When former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta estimated the number of unreported sexual assaults in the U.S. military to be about 19,000, it put in clear focus how prevalent the problem truly is.

You see, in 2011, only 489 court-martial proceedings were carried out among those accused of the crime. Only 2.5 percent of the sexual assault and rape cases in the military resulted in a defined outcome that required testimony from those involved. Shameful.

As the U.S. Senate conducts hearings on military justice and the prevalence of sexual assault, details are emerging that should cause even the most ardent supporter of those in uniform to shudder.

In one case, a military jury found an officer guilty of sexually assaulting a co-worker; however, the presiding officer dismissed the charges without explanation, allowing the perpetrator to go free. In other testimony, victims talked about how merely reporting a case of sexual assault was enough to derail a career, no matter how decorated the soldier had been.

As the U.S. military acknowledges that women have been serving in the line of fire and thus should be allowed to have combat roles within much of the branches, it also is becoming apparent that those women will have to be mindful not only of the enemy but of the sexual predator who may be serving with them. ...

To stem the tide of sexual abuse in the military, Congress and the president must make it easier to file a complaint without threat of retribution, and for those complaints to be investigated. Those falsely accused should feel safe in knowing their careers won't be ruined. And those who have been getting away with abusing their colleagues in service to the country should see the jail time they deserve.

## THE VIEWS PAGE

The **PRESS & DAKOTAN** Views page provides a forum for open discussion of issues and interests affecting our readers. Initialed editorials represent the opinion of the writer, but not necessarily that of the **PRESS & DAKOTAN**. Bylined columns represent the view of the author. We welcome letters to the editor on current topics. Questions regarding the Views page should be directed to Kelly Hertz at [views@yankton.net](mailto:views@yankton.net).

## TODAY IN HISTORY

### By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, March 28, the 87th day of 2013. There are 278 days left in the year.

**Today's Highlight in History:** On March 28, 1979, America's worst commercial nuclear accident occurred inside the Unit 2 reactor at the Three Mile Island plant near Middletown, Pa.

**On this date:** In 1834, the U.S. Senate voted to censure President Andrew Jackson for the removal of federal deposits from the Bank of the United States.

In 1854, during the Crimean War, Britain and France declared war on Russia.

In 1898, the Supreme Court, in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, ruled that a child born in the United States to Chinese immigrants was a U.S. citizen.

In 1930, the names of the Turkish cities of Constantinople and Angora were changed to Istanbul and Ankara.

In 1935, the notorious Nazi propaganda film "Triumph des Willens" (Triumph of the Will), directed by Leni Riefenstahl, premiered in Berlin with Adolf Hitler present.

In 1939, the Spanish Civil War effectively ended as Madrid fell to the forces of Francisco Franco.

In 1941, novelist and critic Virginia Woolf, 59, drowned herself near her home in Lewes, East Sussex, England.

In 1943, composer Sergei Rachmaninoff died in Beverly Hills, Calif.

In 1963, the Alfred Hitchcock film "The Birds" premiered in New York.

In 1969, the 34th president of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, died in Washington D.C. at age 78.

In 1978, in *Stump v. Sparkman*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld, 5-3, the judicial immunity of an Indiana judge against a lawsuit brought by a young woman who'd been ordered sterilized by the judge when she was a teenager.

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush presented the Congressional Gold Medal to the widow of U.S. Olympic legend Jesse Owens.

Ten years ago: American-led forces in

Iraq dropped thousand-pound bombs on Republican Guard units guarding the gates to Baghdad and battled for control of the strategic city of Nasiriyah. President George W. Bush warned of "further sacrifice" ahead in the face of unexpectedly fierce fighting. Japan launched its first spy satellites to monitor communist neighbor North Korea's missile development and suspected nuclear weapons programs.

**Five years ago:** President George W. Bush declared that Iraq was standing at a defining moment as it struggled to put down heavily armed Shiite militias in new flare-ups of violence. Cuba made it legal for its citizens to own cell phones in their own names.

**One year ago:** The U.S. Supreme Court wrapped up three days of public arguments on President Barack Obama's historic health care law. On the last day of his visit, Pope Benedict XVI demanded more freedom for the Roman Catholic Church in communist-run Cuba and preached against "fanaticism" in an unusually political sermon before hundreds of thousands at Revolution Plaza. Bluegrass legend and banjo pioneer Earl Scruggs, 88, died in Nashville, Tennessee.

**Today's Birthdays:** Former White House national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski is 85. Country musician Charlie McCoy is 72. Movie director Mike Newell is 71. Actress Conchata Ferrell is 70. Actor Ken Howard is 69. Actress Dianne Wiest is 65. Country singer Reba McEntire is 58. Olympic gold medal gymnast Bart Conner is 55. Rapper Salt (Salt-N-Pepa) is 47. Actress Tracey Needham is 46. Actor Max Perlich is 45. Movie director Brett Ratner is 44. Country singer Rodney Atkins is 44. Actor Vince Vaughn is 43. Rapper Mr. Cheeks (Lost Boyz) is 42. Actor Ken L. is 40. Rock musician Dave Keuning is 37. Actress Annie Wersching is 36. Actress Julia Stiles is 32. Singer Lady Gaga is 27.

**Thought for Today:** "A man can do his best only by confidently seeking (and perpetually missing) an unattainable perfection." — Ralph Barton Perry, American author and educator (1876-1957).

## FROM THE BIBLE

Now the men who were holding Jesus were mocking Him as they beat Him. Luke 22:63. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

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