



Hollowing Out Government

BY ROBERT B. REICH
Tribune Media Services

The chemical and fertilizer plant in the town of West, Texas, where at least 15 were killed and more than 200 injured a few weeks ago hadn't been fully inspected by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration since 1985. (A partial inspection by a different agency in 2011 resulted in \$5,250 in fines.)

OSHA and its state partners have a total of 2,200 inspectors charged with ensuring the safety of more than 8 million workplaces employing 130 million workers. That comes to about one inspector for every 59,000 American workers.

There's no way it can do its job with so few resources, but OSHA has been systematically hollowed out for years under Republican administrations and congresses that have despised the agency since its inception. In effect, many of our nation's worker-safety laws and rules have been quietly repealed because there aren't enough inspectors to enforce them.

That's been the Republican strategy in general: When they can't directly repeal laws they don't like, they repeal them indirectly by hollowing them out — denying funds to fully implement them, and reducing funds to enforce them.

Consider taxes. Republicans have been unable to round up enough votes to cut taxes on big corporations and the wealthy as much as they'd like, so what do they do? They're hollowing out the IRS. As they cut its enforcement budget — presto! — tax collections decline.

Despite an increasing number of billionaires and multimillionaires using every tax dodge imaginable — laundering their money through phantom corporations and tax havens (Remember Mitt Romney's tax returns?) — the IRS budget has been cut by 17 percent since 2002, adjusted for inflation.

To manage the \$594.5 million in additional cuts required by the sequester, the agency has announced it will furlough each of its more than 89,000 employees for at least five days this year.

This budget stinginess doesn't save the government money. Quite the opposite. Less IRS enforcement means less revenue. It's been estimated that every dollar invested in the IRS's enforcement, modernization and management system reduces the federal budget deficit by \$200, and that furloughing 1,800 IRS "policemen" will cost the Treasury \$4.5 billion in lost revenue.

But congressional Republicans aren't interested in more revenue. Their goal is to cut taxes on big corporations and the wealthy.

Rep. Charles Boustany, the Louisiana Republican who heads the House subcommittee overseeing the IRS, says the IRS sequester cuts should stay in force. He calls for an overhaul of the tax code instead.



Robert REICH

In a similar manner, congressional Republicans and their patrons on Wall Street who opposed the Dodd-Frank financial reform law have been hollowing out the law by making sure agencies charged with implementing it doesn't have the funds they need to do the job.

As a result, much of Dodd-Frank — including the so-called "Volcker Rule" restrictions on the kind of derivatives trading that got the Street into trouble in the first place — is still on the drawing boards.

Perhaps more than any other law, Republicans hate the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare). Yet despite holding more than 33 votes to repeal it, they still haven't succeeded.

So what do they do? They try to hollow it out. Congressional Republicans have repeatedly denied funding requests to implement Obamacare, leaving Health and Human Services (the agency charged with designing the rules under the act and enforcing them) so short-handed that it has to delay much of it.

Even before the sequester, the agency was running on the same budget it had before Obamacare was enacted. Now it's lost billions more.

A new insurance marketplace specifically for small business, for example, was supposed to be up and running in January. But officials now say it won't be available until 2015 in the 33 states where the federal government will be running insurance markets known as exchanges.

This is a potentially large blow to Obamacare's political support. A major selling point for the legislation had been providing affordable health insurance to small businesses and their employees.

Yes, and eroding political support is exactly what congressional Republicans want. They fear that Obamacare, once fully implemented, will be too popular to dismantle. So they're out to delay it as long as possible while keeping up a drumbeat about its flaws.

Repealing laws by hollowing them out — failing to fund their enforcement or implementation — works because the public doesn't know that it's happening. Enactment of a law attracts attention; defunding it doesn't.

The strategy also seems to bolster the Republican view that government is incompetent. If government can't do what it's supposed to do — keep workplaces safe, ensure that the rich pay taxes they owe, protect small investors, implement Obamacare — why give it any additional responsibility?

The public doesn't know that the real reason why the government isn't doing its job is because it's being hollowed out.

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.



Leonard PITTS

Ex-husband, Lee, who lived a while under suspicion of murdering her and who may be tapped to repay the reported \$100,000 payout on her life insurance policy (she was legally declared dead a few years back), has said he sees no purpose in talking with her. Her now adult daughter Morgan posted on Twitter that she hopes her mother "rots in hell."

Who can blame them? They are more than entitled. That said, there is something faintly recognizable in Brenda Heist's story. Not condonable, perhaps not even forgivable, but, yes, recognizable. Who among us, after all, has never daydreamed about running away from life? For the majority of us, it never becomes more than that, but it is there, just the same.

For all its joys and graces, life is not an easy proposition. Sometimes, it is a downright unhappy one. One contends with the big challenges like cancer and divorce, yes. But there are also the small ones — kids, and spouses and taxes and utility bills and setbacks and deadlines and waiting in line at the DMV — that are the true meat of daily existence.

We'll probably never know — she may not truly know — if any of this is what caused Heist to break. All we know is that something did and when it did, when she wound up weeping in that park, she responded by reaching out for the daydream. There is something pathetic about that. Something instructive, too.

See, you can run to Key West. You can sail down to Tolhuin, a tiny village near the tip of South America. You can even trek across Antarctica and come up the other side of the globe. Doesn't matter. Because as Brenda Heist's bill for damages comes due, one thing about running away from life seems painfully clear. Life always catches up.

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.

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OPINION | OUR VIEW

Marriage, Birth Data May Be Red Flags

Apparently, no one can accuse South Dakotans of being slaves to tradition, at least when it comes to the concepts of marriage and parenting.

The first point of tradition that seems to have gone by the wayside is the notion that marriage and parenthood firmly belong together.

A new U.S. Census Bureau report shows that South Dakota's rate of out-of-wedlock births is climbing steadily. As of 2010, 34.7 percent of all births in South Dakota — slightly more than one in every three — occurred without the bonds of marriage coming into play. Indeed, the state's marriage rate has dived 17 percent since 2000.

This statistical finding actually touches on a national trend concerning marriage and parenthood.

However, South Dakota, which ranks 19th nationally in out-of-wedlock births, seems to be an outlier compared to its neighbors. Nebraska ranks 47th in such births (25.3 percent), Iowa is 34th (31.5 percent), North Dakota is 40th (30.1 percent), Minnesota is 38th (30.7 percent), Montana is 48th (23.8 percent) and Wyoming is 33rd (31.6 percent).

On the plus side, South Dakota's 34.7 percent rate is still below the national average of 35.7 percent.

This situation could pose numerous problems for South Dakota, even if you do not firmly adhere to the axiom that marriage is morally essential before setting out upon the seas of parenthood.

Marriage generally (or, in theory) has a much better chance of providing a stable environment in which to raise children. There are two adults creating the dynamic in which a child can be nurtured, and it can foster a more stable economic base to create a solid home life. Let us acknowledge that there are certainly a lot of exceptions to this recipe, but in broad sociological terms, the odds of stability for a child would seem to increase with two committed (which often, but not only, includes a bond of marriage) parents on hand.

Conversely, some researchers suggest that births outside of marriage tend to happen in younger, poorer and less educated households. If something happens in which the single parents (usually a mother) cannot keep up with providing the child with what he/she needs, the parent often turns to government help, which means taxpayers become part of the support mechanism.

South Dakota's statistical situation can also be attributed to the high number of Native American births out of wedlock. According to the Census, 85.1 percent of Native American births in this state happen outside marriage. (The national average among Native Americans is 64 percent.) Since some of the poorest counties in the nation can be found on South Dakota reservations, there seems to be a correlation in the works.

Thus, this trend in non-married births could be viewed as a problem, since it could be tied to economic stresses either now or in the future. And once again, we all pay for that one way or another.

None of this is to suggest that marriage is THE answer to this situation, because a bad marriage is certainly not better than — or even remotely equal to — a solid, stable single-parent household.

What we do have, however, is a potential red flag that can have numerous negative consequences for this state. It could be argued that the only way to address the matter would be to pursue one of two paths: reinforce the importance of marriage in parenting, or improve economic opportunities so that single-parent households are more stable. In fact, doing a little of both wouldn't hurt, and it may be the best way to strengthen South Dakota's future.

kmh

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, May 8, the 128th day of 2013. There are 237 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On May 8, 1945, President Harry S. Truman announced on radio that Nazi Germany's forces had surrendered, and that "the flags of freedom fly all over Europe."

On this date: In 1541, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto reached the Mississippi River.

In 1794, Antoine Lavoisier, the father of modern chemistry, was executed on the guillotine during France's Reign of Terror.

In 1884, the 33rd president of the United States, Harry S. Truman, was born in Lamar, Mo.

In 1886, Atlanta pharmacist John Pemberton invented the flavor syrup for Coca-Cola.

In 1921, Sweden's Parliament voted to abolish the death penalty.

In 1958, Vice President Richard Nixon was shoved, stoned, booed and spat upon by anti-American protesters in Lima, Peru.

In 1962, the musical comedy "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" opened on Broadway.

In 1972, President Richard Nixon announced that he had ordered the mining of Haiphong Harbor during the Vietnam War.

In 1973, militant American Indians who'd held the South Dakota hamlet of Wounded Knee for ten weeks surrendered.

In 1984, the Soviet Union announced it would boycott the upcoming Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

In 1988, science-fiction author Robert A. Heinlein died in Carmel, Calif., at age 80.

In 1993, the Muslim-led government of Bosnia-Herzegovina and rebel Bosnian Serbs signed an agreement for a nationwide cease-fire.

Ten years ago: The Senate unanimously endorsed adding to NATO seven former communist nations: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. A federal grand jury indicted Chinese-born California socialite Katrina Leung on charges that she'd illegally taken, copied and kept secret documents ob-

tained from an FBI agent. (A federal judge later dismissed the case against Leung, rebuking prosecutors for misconduct.) The rear door of a Russian-built cargo plane burst open over Congo, hurling more than 100 Congolese soldiers and their families to their deaths.

Five years ago: Sen. Barack Obama got a front-runner's welcome back at the U.S. Capitol, where he was surrounded on the House floor by well-wishers calling him "Mr. President" and reaching out to pat him on the back or shake his hand. Silvio Berlusconi was sworn in as Italy's premier. Country music star Eddy Arnold died near Nashville at age 89.

One year ago: Six-term veteran Indiana Sen. Richard Lugar lost a bitter Republican primary challenge, his nearly four-decade career in the Senate ended by tea party-backed state Treasurer Richard Mourdock. North Carolina voters decided overwhelmingly to strengthen their state's gay marriage ban. Children's book author Maurice Sendak died in Danbury, Conn. Former U.S. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, 90, died in Skillman, N.J. Josh Hamilton became the 16th player to hit four home runs in a game, carrying the Texas Rangers to a 10-3 victory over the Baltimore Orioles.

Today's Birthdays: Comedian Don Rickles is 87. Naturalist Sir David Attenborough is 87. Singer Toni Tennille is 73. Actor James Mitchum is 72. Country singer Jack Blanchard is 71. Jazz musician Keith Jarrett is 68. Singer Philip Bailey (Earth, Wind and Fire) is 62. Rock musician Chris Frantz (Talking Heads) is 62. Rockabilly singer Billy Burnette is 60. Rock musician Alex Van Halen is 60. Actor David Keith is 59. Actor Stephen Furst is 59. Actress Melissa Gilbert is 49. Rock musician Dave Rowntree (Blur) is 49. Country musician Del Gray is 45. Rock singer Darren Hayes is 41. Singer Enrique Iglesias is 38. Actor Matt Davis is 35. Singer Ana Maria Lombo (Eden's Crush) is 35. Actress Julia Whelan is 29.

Thought for Today: "Always listen to experts. They'll tell you what can't be done, and why. Then do it." — Robert A. Heinlein (1907-1988)

FROM THE BIBLE

I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David. Jeremiah 33:15.
Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

YOUR LETTERS

Auto Skills Accolades

Sapa Extrusions, Hedahls Auto Parts and Lewis and Clark Ford

Yankton High School has two teams that went to State competition for automotive troubleshooting. Yankton entered two teams into the Ford/AAA Student Auto Skills competition. Both teams qualified for state.

We would like to congratulate our teams of:

- Bryce Keegan and Isaiah Groetken;
- Liam Wright and Damian Janssen.

We would also like to extend a very large Thank You to our sponsors for affording our students the opportunity to participate in this competition; it was a great learning experience. The student technicians did receive scholarships to technical colleges that will help them enrich their skills and abilities.

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