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OPINION | OUR VIEW

The City Manager System Works Well

We feel we must rise today in defense of Yankton's city manager form of government, which has been in place for almost six decades and has, we believe, operated fairly well in guiding this community.

The dialogue is needed because the form of government was called into question by outgoing Yankton City Commissioner Paul Lowrie in a *Press & Dakotan* story published Monday. He said he believes Yankton should revert back to a mayoral form of government with a five-person City Commission because it would prompt more debate and issue exploration. It would also permit the citizens of Yankton to have direct control over the city's affairs.

These are good points to make concerning the management of city affairs, in part because — given that this city has undergone a change of governing structures at one time in its history — it's always healthy to question where we are going and if there are better options to take us there.

Indeed, this is pretty much what the thinking was in the late 1940s when Yankton contemplated the idea of switching from the mayoral form of government to a city manager form.

According to the book "Yankton County History," one of the reasons mentioned for switching to a city manager form of government was, in effect, one of the points Lowrie was making for changing it. There were concerns back in the late 1940s and early 1950s that the mayoral system in this city cultivated insulated leadership and cronyism that potentially left too much power in the hands of a few and created a lack of access for the public. The interest in changing government forms also arose from an airport-lease audit done in the late 1940s that called into question several accounting procedures used. Recommendations were made and implemented but shortly thereafter discarded by the commission, all of which added to overall public unrest. It was decided that a city manager could work above such things while being a full-time watchdog of the city's affairs, and the city manager form of government was instituted in 1955.

Admittedly, Yankton's history with a city manager hasn't always sailed smoothly, as was witnessed with the removal of an administrator five years ago as part of what we now refer to as the "recall episode." But overall, the system has worked well and is the best vehicle for moving this community forward.

Yankton is better served by a full-time administrator overseeing the daily business than it is with a part-time mayor and commissioners. It makes this community more responsive to changing events and potentially better suited to take advantage of economic opportunities when they arise. While there are already full-time department heads running various phases of the municipal operation, we feel it works best when there is someone who can run the show on a daily basis while working for and with the commissioners.

As far as public access goes, it must be remembered that a city manager is a managerial instrument for the City Commission, which has the final say on all things. Therefore, to access government, one merely has to access a commissioner.

Ultimately, a city manager is charged with running an operation smoothly and with pursuing opportunities aggressively — all on a full-time basis. It's a sound investment for the community.

Again, it never hurts to question the wisdom of the current form of local government, whatever that form happens to be. It generates discussion, and that's one of the key components of our democracy. It makes a government of the people a people's government. We think what we have now works well, and hopefully, this discussion will remind people of that rather important fact.

kmh

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, May 22, the 142nd day of 2013. There are 223 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On May 22, 1913, the American Cancer Society was founded in New York by a group of doctors and business leaders under its original name, the American Society for the Control of Cancer.

On this date: In 1813, composer Richard Wagner was born in Leipzig, Germany.

In 1860, the United States and Japan exchanged ratifications of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce during a ceremony in Washington.

In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appeared before Congress to explain his decision to veto a bill that would have allowed World War I veterans to cash in bonus certificates before their 1945 due date.

In 1939, the foreign ministers of Germany and Italy, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Galeazzo Ciano, signed a "Pact of Steel" committing the two countries to a military alliance.

In 1947, the Truman Doctrine was enacted as Congress appropriated military and economic aid for Greece and Turkey.

In 1960, an earthquake of magnitude 9.5, the strongest ever measured, struck southern Chile, claiming some 1,655 lives.

In 1963, Greek politician Grigoris Lambrakis was attacked by right-wingers after delivering a speech in Thessaloniki; he died five days later. (The assassination inspired a book as well as the 1969 Costa-Gavras film "Z.")

In 1968, the nuclear-powered submarine USS Scorpion, with 99 men aboard, sank in the Atlantic Ocean. (The remains of the sub were later found on the ocean floor 400 miles southwest of the Azores.)

In 1969, the lunar module of Apollo 10, with Thomas P. Stafford and Eugene Cernan aboard, flew to within nine miles of the moon's surface in a dress rehearsal for the first lunar landing.

In 1972, President Richard Nixon began a visit to the Soviet Union, during which he and Kremlin leaders signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The island nation of Ceylon became the republic of Sri Lanka.

In 1981 "Yorkshire Ripper" Peter Sutcliffe was convicted in London of murdering 13 women and was sentenced to life in prison.

In 1992, after a reign lasting nearly 30 years, Johnny Carson hosted NBC's "Tonight Show" for the last time.

Ten years ago: The U.N. Security Council gave the U.S. and Britain a mandate to rule Iraq, ending 13 years of economic sanctions. Annika Sorenstam became the first woman since Babe Didrik-

son Zaharias in 1945 to tee off against the men on the pro tour, playing in the first round of the Colonial golf tournament in Fort Worth, Texas. (Sorenstam missed the cut the next day by four shots.)

Five years ago: A Texas appeals court said the state had no right to take more than 400 children from a polygamist group's ranch the previous month. (The children were returned to their parents.) Britain's Conservative Party won a special election that was viewed as a rebuke to Prime Minister and Labour Party leader Gordon Brown. Indiana Jones returned to the big screen in "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull."

One year ago: The Falcon 9, built by billionaire businessman Elon Musk, sped toward the International Space Station with a load of groceries and other supplies, marking the first time a commercial spacecraft had been sent to the orbiting outpost. In Flint, Mich., Elias Abuelazam, a drifter accused of faking car trouble, then stabbing strangers who came to his aid, was convicted of murdering handyman Arnold Minor after jurors rejected an insanity defense. Wesley A. Brown, the first African-American to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, died in Silver Spring, Md., at age 85. Green Bay Packers receiver Donald Driver and his professional partner, Peta Murgatroyd, won "Dancing with the Stars" on ABC.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Charles Aznavour is 89. Actor Michael Constantine is 86. Conductor Peter Nero is 79. Actor-director Richard Benjamin is 75. Actor Frank Converse is 75. Former CNN anchor Bernard Shaw is 73. Actress Barbara Parkins is 71. Retired MLB All-Star pitcher Tommy John is 70. Songwriter Bernie Taupin is 63. Actor-producer Al Corley is 57. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, is 56. Singer Morrissey is 54. Actress Ann Cusack is 52. Country musician Dana Williams (Diamond Rio) is 52. Rock musician Jesse Valenzuela is 51. Actor Mark Christopher Lawrence is 49. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney is 48. Rhythm-and-blues singer Johnny Gill (New Edition) is 47. Rock musician Dan Roberts (Crash Test Dummies) is 46. Actress Brooke Smith is 46. Model Naomi Campbell is 43. Actress Anna Belknap is 41. Actress Alison Eastwood is 41. Singer Donnell Jones is 40. Actor Sean Gunn is 39. Actress A.J. Langer is 39. Actress Ginnifer Goodwin is 35. Actress Maggie Q is 34. Olympic gold-medal speed skater Apolo Anton Ohno is 31.

Thought for Today: "It is often said that men are ruled by their imaginations; but it would be truer to say they are governed by the weakness of their imaginations." — Walter Bagehot, English editor and economist (1826-1877).

FROM THE BIBLE

[Jesus said], "I am the light of the world." John 8:12. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

The Genius Of America

BY ROBERT B. REICH
 Tribune Media Services

Many of you soon-to-be college graduates are determined to make the world a better place. Some of you are choosing careers in public service or joining nonprofits or volunteering in your communities.

But many of you are cynical about politics. You see the system as inherently corrupt. You doubt real progress is possible.

"What chance do we have against the Koch brothers and the other billionaires?" you've asked me. "How can we fight against Monsanto, Boeing, J.P. Morgan and Bank of America? They buy elections. They run America."

Let me remind you: Cynicism is a self-fulfilling prophecy. You have no chance if you assume you have no chance.

"But it was different when you graduated," you say. "The '60s were a time of social progress."

You don't know your history.

When I graduated in 1968, the Vietnam War was raging. Over half a million American troops were already there. I didn't know if I'd be drafted. A member of my class who spoke at commencement said he was heading to Canada and urged us to join him.

Two months before, Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated. America's cities were burning. Bobby Kennedy had just been gunned down.

George ("segregation forever") Wallace was on his way to garnering 10 million votes and carrying five Southern states. Richard Nixon was well on his way to becoming president.

America was still mired in bigotry. I remember a classmate who was dating a black girl being spit on in a movie theater. The Supreme Court had only the year before struck down state laws against interracial marriage. My entire graduating class of almost 800 contained only six young black men and four Hispanics.

I remember the girlfriend of another classmate almost dying from a back-alley abortion, because safe abortions were almost impossible to get.

I remember a bright young female law school graduate in tears because no law firm would hire her because she was a woman.

I remember one of my classmates telling me in anguish that he was a homosexual, fearing he'd be discovered and his career would be ruined.

The environmental movement had yet not been born. Two-thirds of America's waterways were unsafe for swimming or fishing because of industrial waste and sewage.

I remember rivers so polluted they caught fire. When the Cuyahoga River went up in flames, *Time* Magazine described it as the river that "oozes rather than flows," in which a person "does not drown but decays."

In those days, universal health insurance was a pipe dream.

It all seemed pretty hopeless. I assumed America was going to hell.

And yet, reforms did occur. America changed. The changes didn't come easily. Every positive step was met with determined resistance. But we became better and stronger because we were determined to change.

When I graduated college, I would not have believed that in my lifetime women would gain rights over their own bodies, including the legal right to have an abortion. Or that women would become chief executives of major corporations, secretaries of state, contenders for the presidency. Or that they'd outnumber men in college.

I would not have imagined that 11 states would allow gays and lesbians to marry, and that a majority of Americans would support equal marriage rights.

Or that the nation would have a large and growing black middle class.

It would have seemed impossible that a black man, the child of an interracial couple, would become president of the United States.

I would not have predicted that the rate of college enrollment among Hispanics would exceed that of whites.

Or that more than 80 percent of Americans would have health insurance, most of it through government.

I wouldn't have foreseen that the Cuyahoga River — the one that used to catch fire regularly — would come to support 44 species of fish. And that over half our rivers and 70 percent of bays and estuaries would become safe for swimming and fishing.

Or that the portion of children with elevated levels of lead in their blood would have dropped from 88 percent to just over 4 percent.

I would not have believed our nation capable of so much positive change.

Yet we achieved it. And we have just begun. Widening inequality, a shrinking middle class, global warming, the corruption of our democracy by big money — all of these, and more, must be addressed. To make progress on these — and to prevent ourselves from slipping backwards — will require no less steadfastness, intelligence and patience than was necessitated before.

The genius of America lies in its resilience and pragmatism. We believe in social progress because we were born into it. It is our national creed.

Which is to say, I understand your cynicism. It looks pretty hopeless.

But, believe me, it isn't. Not if you pitch in.

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.



Robert REICH

YOUR LETTERS

A Man For All Seasons!

Barbara Christensen, Yankton

Lewis and Clark Theatre Co. Board/Life Member

A couple of summers ago, Chuck Lambert decided he was going to raise money for the Dakota Theatre, and that was that. He climbed up to the top of the marquee in front and set himself up with an umbrella and a lawn chair, much to the horror of all of us standing by.

He perched up there for hours. Unfortunately, it was a July day and that summer was very hot. It was over 100 on the ground. Who knew what it was on top of the marquee in the western sun? But Chuck was determined: He happily chatted with all passersby, many of whom wrote checks.

After hours and hours, so the story goes — and it has become a theater legend — a lady came by and asked him what in the world he was doing. You can imagine the conversation!

Chuck replied he was raising money for the roof replacement and he wasn't coming down until he had it all.

"How much are you short?" she asked. "A thousand dollars," he replied.

The lady thought a minute and said, "All right. If you

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■ The View 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.

come down, I'll write you a check for that amount."

And down he came.

Is the story true? I have no idea, but it has become, as I said, a theater legend. Who was this wonderful lady? I don't know but wish I did. Chuck was in ill health even then and I'm convinced she saved his life and we were able to have Chuck here for a couple of years more until May 1, 2013.

This story personified his quirky charm, his humor, his determination and his dedication — a man truly not just for the theater season, but for all seasons.

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