

THE PRESS & DAKOTAN

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Prayer Need Not Be Divisive Issue

RAPID CITY JOURNAL (May 11): The recent U.S. Supreme Court decision to allow prayers before government meetings quieted what had been a sometimes contentious debate over the appropriateness of public prayer.

In Rapid City and elsewhere, threats of lawsuits were received from groups opposed to public prayer as a breach of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment. Although the phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the First Amendment, it has been interpreted by some as intending to bar religious expression such as prayer at government functions.

The Supreme Court's decision settles the argument between those who support prayer in the public square and those who are opposed.

The court's acceptance of public prayer validates the Rapid City Council's decision last year to defy threats of a lawsuit if its tradition of praying before council meetings didn't stop.

In January 2013, the Rapid City Council received a letter from Freedom From Religion Foundation threatening legal action if the council didn't end the practice of an invocation before meetings. Council members voiced their support for the prayers, which are offered by members of the Rapid City Ministerial Association. The council also asked for the city attorney to draw up a policy on prayer.

The proposed prayer policy was rejected by the city council, and the prayers have continued.

Meanwhile, several groups offered to pay the city's legal bills if it was sued by the Freedom From Religion group.

The Supreme Court's decision to allow prayers before meetings ends Freedom From Religion's threat of litigation and validates the Rapid City Council's support of its prayer tradition.

We are thankful that the Supreme Court has removed the possibility of a lawsuit that would cost taxpayers to fight.

We never saw a problem with public prayer. If some people object to prayers spoken before government meetings, we take note that no one is being forced to participate in the prayers and are free to leave if they so choose.

There are many divisive issues that face Rapid City and other communities; the fact that some people voluntarily bow their heads in prayer before discussing these important matters should not be made contentious.

OUR LETTER POLICY

The PRESS & DAKOTAN encourages its readers to write letters to the editor, and it asks that a few simple guidelines be followed.

■ Please limit letters to 300 words or less. Letters should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind.

■ In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the PRESS & DAKOTAN will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses.

■ Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.

■ Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail to: Letters, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078, drop off at 319 Walnut in Yankton, fax to 665-1721 or email to views@yankton.net.

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press
Today is Monday, May 19, the 139th day of 2014. There are 226 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On May 19, 1864, American author Nathaniel Hawthorne, 59, died in Plymouth, New Hampshire.

On this date: In 1536, Anne Boleyn, the second wife of England's King Henry VIII, was beheaded after being convicted of adultery.

In 1780, a mysterious darkness enveloped much of New England and part of Canada in the early afternoon.

In 1913, California Gov. Hiram Johnson signed the Webb-Hartley Law prohibiting "aliens ineligible to citizenship" from owning farm land, a measure targeting Asian immigrants, particularly Japanese.

In 1921, Congress passed, and President Warren G. Harding signed, the Emergency Quota Act, which established national quotas for immigrants.

In 1935, T.E. Lawrence, also known as "Lawrence of Arabia," died in Dorset, England, six days after being injured in a motorcycle crash.

In 1943, in his second wartime address to the U.S. Congress, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill pledged his country's full support in the fight against Japan. That same day, top U.S. and British officials meeting in Washington reached agreement on May 1, 1944 as the date for the D-Day invasion of France (the operation ended up being launched more than a month later).

In 1954, American composer Charles Ives, 79, died in New York.

In 1962, actress Marilyn Monroe sang "Happy Birthday to You" to President John F. Kennedy during a Democratic fundraiser at New York's Madison Square Garden.

In 1964, the State Department disclosed that 40 hidden microphones had been found in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

In 1973, Secretariat won the Preakness Stakes, the second of its Triple Crown victories.

In 1981, five British soldiers were killed by an Irish Republican Army landmine in County Armagh, Northern Ireland.

In 1994, former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis died in New York at age 64.

Ten years ago: Army Reserve Spc. Jeremy C. Svits wept and apologized after receiving a year in prison and a bad conduct discharge in the first court-martial stemming from abuse of Iraqis at the Abu Ghraib prison. Frustrated relatives of World Trade Center victims heckled former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani during his appearance before the September 11 commission. Two men hurled purple cornstarch at British Prime Minister Tony Blair in the House of Commons. Manmohan Singh was named India's new prime minister. Millionaire philanthropist Jack Eckerd, founder of the drugstore chain that bore his name, died in Clearwater, Florida, at age 91.

Five years ago: President Barack Obama asked consumers to back his plan for higher efficiency standards for cars and trucks, saying drivers would make up the higher cost of cleaner vehicles at the gas pump.

One year ago: President Barack Obama, in a soaring commencement address on work, sacrifice and opportunity, told graduates of historically black Morehouse College in Atlanta to seize the power of their example as black men graduating from college and use it to improve people's lives.

Today's Birthdays: PBS newscaster Jim Lehrer is 80. TV personality David Hartman is 79. Actor James Fox is 75. Actress Nancy Kwan is 75. Actor Peter Mayhew is 70. Rock singer-composer Pete Townshend (The Who) is 69. Concert pianist David Helfgott is 67. Rock singer-musician Dusty Hill (ZZ Top) is 65. Singer-actress Grace Jones is 62. Rock musician Phil Rudd (AC/DC) is 60. Actor Steven Ford is 58. Rock musician Iain Harvie (Del Amitri) is 52. Actress Polly Walker is 48. Actor Jason Gray-Stanford is 44. Gospel singer Israel Houghton is 43. Rock singer Jenny Berggren (Ace of Base) is 42. Country/rock singer Shooter Jennings is 35. Actor Drew Fuller is 34. Christian rock musician Tim McTague is 31. Rock musician James Richardson (MGMT) is 31. Actor Eric Lloyd is 28.

Thought for Today: "How slowly I have made my way in life! How much is still to be done!" — Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864).

FROM THE BIBLE

The reproofs of discipline are the way of life. Proverbs 6:23. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

YOUR LETTERS

Lions' Projects

Yankton Lions Club
The Yankton Lions Club members want to thank the Yankton community for the support they generously give to the projects of the club. The Law Enforcement recognition ticket sales proceeds were donated to: CASA, DARE, Boys and Girls club, the Contact Center, the Homeless Shelter, Womans/Childrens Shelter and

Yankton Literary Council.
The Flag contract program proceeds are used to purchase eyeglasses for the needy in our community. Members provide the flag and hang the American Flag on 10 special days in the year for the business places that have purchased a contract. If you wish to have the Lions provide this service to you, please contact the Flag Committee at 664-6800 or 665-4694.



Capitol Notebook

Republicans Feel Safe Battering Obamacare

BY BOB MERCER

State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — Time for a confession: As a human being, I don't understand why so many people want to repeal Obamacare.

The whole point of the Affordable Care Act, I thought, was to require that almost everybody have health coverage, either through insurance or the government.

If you don't like President Obama, or you don't like Democrats, or you don't like features of Obamacare, I understand.

But tell me this: Why don't you want to increase the number of people covered by health insurance?

Obamacare should be a godsend to South Dakota insurance businesses.

Our Legislature passed a state law last year requiring that Obamacare policies purchased by South Dakotans must be obtained through a South Dakota insurance producer.

Two of the key lobbyists in that 2013 effort are working on the U.S. Senate campaign of former Gov. Mike Rounds, who runs an insurance and real estate business.

Yet repealing Obamacare is the main topic in South Dakota this spring for the five Republicans, including Rounds, who are seeking their party's nomination for U.S. Senate.

It seems mathematically unlikely that Congress would repeal Obamacare during the next two years while President Obama is still in office.

Opponents of Obamacare would need two-thirds majorities in both the Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives to override a presidential veto.

Meanwhile state Attorney General Marty Jackley is taking another route.

Jackley, a Republican, announced Friday he added South Dakota to 20 states claiming in a

federal lawsuit that Obamacare was passed illegally.

The legal argument is the U.S. Constitution requires that federal tax increases originate in the U.S. House. Obamacare resulted from Senate amendments to a House bill on military homeowner tax breaks.

Our Legislature routinely does this type of maneuver. It's called a hoghouse. A bill is gutted of its original purpose and passed in altogether different form.

The federal lawsuit will determine whether the U.S. Supreme Court holds Congress to a higher standard than we hold our lawmakers in South Dakota.

Somehow the 2014 Republican Senate primary in South Dakota has turned into a question of whether grandpa will still be able to get his new knee or new hip.

That's because Obamacare is portrayed as siphoning funds from Medicare.

Here's the part where I become confused.

It would be mean if a retired person on Medicare doesn't get that replacement joint, right?

But wouldn't it be just as mean, to take away Obamacare coverage for a lower-income worker, who is too young for Medicare, and makes too much to qualify for Medicaid, and is paying for an Obamacare policy?

South Dakota voters set the tone two years ago. They rejected a ballot measure that sought to raise the state sales tax by 1 cent.

Half of the money was to go to K-12 schools. The other half was for Medicaid.

The vote was 151,498 yes and 198,586 no. Only five counties voted in favor of IM 15.

They were Todd, Shannon, Marshall, Clay and Brookings.

So politically I understand why the Republican candidates feel safe saying they want to repeal Obamacare.

Majority rules.



Bob MERCER

The VA's Bureaucratic Drones

BY MICHELLE MALKIN

Creators.com

At least 40 American veterans are dead thanks to bureaucratic delays at Veterans Affairs clinics. But you wouldn't know it from VA Secretary Gen. Eric Shinseki's bland and bloodless demeanor at a Senate hearing Thursday. He droned on like an apathetic office manager fielding complaints about the copier being jammed.

Shinseki told the Senate panel he "can't remember" getting warnings from federal watchdogs last fall about ghost clinics and double-scheduling schemes. He said he was "not aware" of explosive book-cooking allegations like the ones at a Fort Collins, Colo., VA facility, where employees were ordered to make their records show that veterans got appointments within 14 days of the day requested, whether or not it was true.

In response to bipartisan disgust with the VA's serial incompetence and fatally long wait times, oblivious Shinseki blathered about "customer satisfaction surveys." And when it came time to deliver his calculated sound bite about being "mad as hell" at mounting allegations of criminal fraud and neglect, Shinseki's perfunctory tone echoed a jaded 411 operator: "City and state, please?"

Asked whether VA employees who alter records should be fired, Shinseki's deputy Robert Petzel said he didn't know "whether that's the appropriate level of punishment." Shinseki interjected that a whopping 3,000 VA workers, including senior managers, had been "involuntarily removed" for misconduct last year — only to admit that an unknown number of those had simply been reassigned or allowed to retire.

In true paper-pusher form, the VA's top brass have ordered yet another study to assess how and why the VA ignored years of other studies, reports and audits of the department's waste, fraud and abuse. Showing even more tone-deafness, Shinseki bragged openly about his close friendship with top White House aide Rob Nabors, who is now overseeing the kabuki "review" of his department's failures.

Can you spell crony whitewash? Pressed on why he hadn't reported illegal data falsification to the FBI, Shinseki demurred that it was the inspector general's call, not his.

In other words: The buck stops somewhere else.

Attorney General Eric Holder hid behind the

VA inspector general, too. There are no plans for a DoJ probe into the secret waiting lists at the Phoenix VA hospital, where scores of sick vets languished for months before perishing. Question: Why is activist zealot Holder so content to wait for the IG?

Given this administration's shady record of crushing whistleblowers, railroading IGs and replacing them with dirty lapdogs, Shinseki's vow to "get to the bottom" of this latest deadly scandal while Holder and the FBI sit on the sidelines stinks to high hell.

Taking care of the nation's war veterans is an obligation that has existed since the days of the Continental Congress. But for decades, under both GOP and Democratic administrations, the men and women who served our country have been literally left to die by government caretakers.

Fifteen years ago, I reported on VA bureaucrats who took better care of administrative buildings and vacant hospitals than their own patients. Back then, an independent General Accounting Office found that the agency was spending more than \$1 million a day to sustain unneeded hospital buildings. Another \$35 million was squandered annually to perform upkeep on empty space, including unused lots and warehouses, while vets were forced to file malpractice suits over substandard care.

We "have created the damndest country club in America," one VA watchdog activist I quoted said at the time. "Whatever toys they want, they get. Nobody is watching what they spend these millions of dollars on, and obviously, no one cares."

Fifteen years later, it's the same old, same old. More empty excuses, feckless denials and deadly red tape. The names change, but the game's the same: "Support the troops" platitudes and photo-ops at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. "Screw the troops" in the bowels of the VA bureaucracy, where book-cookers were busy collecting bonuses instead of saving lives. And everyone at the top refuses to resign.

It's self-serving government as usual. I'd ask how "hope and change" is working out for the affected veterans. But they're not around to answer. Their chilling silence speaks volumes.

Michelle Malkin is the author of "Culture of Corruption: Obama and his Team of Tax Cheats, Crooks and Cronies" (Regnery 2010). Her e-mail address is malkinblog@gmail.com.

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