

## THE PRESS &amp; DAKOTAN

THE DAKOTAS' OLDEST NEWSPAPER | FOUNDED 1861

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## OPINION

## Nation Must Face The VA Scandal

The Veterans Administration's current health-care woes are an embarrassment and a disgrace.

They're an embarrassment to President Barack Obama, who vowed in 2008 to take care of our veterans, but has seen that typically clarion pledge go unrealized.

It's an embarrassment to those lawmakers, affiliated with both parties, who have given mere lip service to this issue for years. These people seem more adept at creating new veterans than helping those who have served us with their military commitment.

And it's a disgrace for this nation, the world's leading military power — a nation that spends more than the next 10 countries combined on defense, but struggles to provide care for our soldiers once they come home to us.

Instead, we serve up a convenient circus of damnation, calculated outrage and buck-passing the likes of which we haven't seen since the last time veterans' issues caught our attention, and the time before that and the time before that. There have been immediate calls for superficial change — such as demanding the firing of Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki, a move about which even veterans' groups are divided — but these cries mostly put Band-Aids on the wounds of the issue rather than analyze the systemic failures and work to correct them.

The VA situation has arguably been mischaracterized. The administration currently treats an estimated 230,000 patients a day in 151 hospitals and 820 outpatient clinics, according to the *New York Times*. The problem generally isn't the quality of care — which, the *Times* reports, is rated "from good to excellent" — but access to it.

As *Time* magazine pointed out in an online article, these problems with scheduling backlogs and cooked books go back several years. Indeed, Obama's transition team was made aware of them by Bush administration officials before the current president took office. Since then, the number of veterans who have entered the VA system have surged, further exacerbating the unaddressed problems.

Obama now must show more than the anger he professes to harbor. He has been called out for being passive on this issue, and he can respond to such a charge by actually living up to his campaign rhetoric. He is deservedly taking heat, but he is also in an extraordinary position to take a desperately needed lead on this issue.

He must do so because so few lawmakers seem willing to honestly embrace the problem. Everyone in D.C. says they back the troops and support our veterans, but few have worked to address these issues, which have multiplied greatly since 2001. As the *National Journal* noted: "When incidents — such as the recent hospital deaths — capture public attention, lawmakers hold hearings where they berate VA officials with juicy sound bites they can later play back for their constituents. It's good political theater, but it's unclear that the payoff is anything other than political."

The beleaguered VA itself is part of the problem. There have been accusations that VA officials have permitted a bureaucratic rot to fester in its ranks, and they often don't request enough money to cover projected expenses. The *National Journal* noted that the VA has been slow to modernize its own systems — it didn't start to digitally process claims until just last year, for instance — and to update its own data for projections, which has contributed to these daunting problems.

So the issues are old and festering. This president can do something about it, and should. So, too, should this Congress.

The thing is, we don't want them to tell us what they are going to do. We've been hearing that for too many years.

Instead, they must show us. There have been too many broken promises and too much chest-thumping to take such vows at face value now. We need to see action. Period.

kmh

## ON THIS DATE

## By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, May 28, the 148th day of 2014. There are 217 days left in the year.

**Today's Highlight in History:** On May 28, 1934, the Dionne quintuplets — Annette, Cecile, Emilie, Marie and Yvonne — were born to Elzire Dionne at the family farm in Ontario, Canada. (Of the five, Annette and Cecile are still living.)

**On this date:** In 1533, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, declared the marriage of England's King Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn valid.

In 1863, the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, made up of freed blacks, left Boston to fight for the Union in the Civil War.

In 1892, the Sierra Club was organized in San Francisco.

In 1912, the Senate Commerce Committee issued its report on the Titanic disaster that cited a "state of absolute unpreparedness," improperly tested safety equipment and an "indifference to danger" as some of the causes of an "unnecessary tragedy."

In 1929, the first all-color talking picture, "On with the Show," opened in New York.

In 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt pushed a button in Washington signaling that vehicular traffic could begin crossing the just-opened Golden Gate Bridge in California. Neville Chamberlain became prime minister of Britain.

In 1940, during World War II, the Belgian army surrendered to invading German forces.

In 1959, the U.S. Army launched Able, a rhesus monkey, and Baker, a squirrel monkey, aboard a Jupiter missile for a suborbital flight which both primates survived.

In 1961, Amnesty International had its beginnings with the publication of an article in the British newspaper *The Observer*, "The Forgotten Prisoners."

In 1964, the charter of the Palestine Liberation Organization was issued at the start of a meeting of the Palestine National Congress in Jerusalem.

In 1977, 165 people were killed when fire raced through the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Kentucky.

In 1984, President Ronald Reagan led a state funeral at Arlington National Cemetery for an unidentified American soldier killed in the Vietnam War. (However, the remains were later identified through DNA as those of Air Force 1st Lt. Michael J. Blassie, and

were sent to St. Louis for hometown burial.)

**Ten years ago:** The Iraqi Governing Council chose Iyad Allawi, a longtime anti-Saddam Hussein exile, to become prime minister of Iraq's interim government. Some three dozen people were killed by a powerful earthquake in northern Iran.

**Five years ago:** A white New York City police officer killed an off-duty black colleague in a friendly fire incident in East Harlem. (A grand jury declined to indict Officer Andrew Dunton in the shooting of Officer Omar Edwards, who had drawn his gun and was chasing a man who had broken into his car.) Kavya Shivashankar, a 13-year-old girl from Kansas, spelled "Laodicean" (lukewarm or indifferent in religion or politics) to win the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

**One year ago:** Calling it perhaps the biggest money-laundering scheme in U.S. history, federal prosecutors charged seven people with running what amounted to an online, underworld bank, saying that Liberty Reserve handled \$6 billion for drug dealers, child pornographers, identity thieves and other criminals around the globe.

**Today's Birthdays:** Rockabilly singer-musician Sonny Burgess is 85. Actress Carroll Baker is 83. Producer-director Irwin Winkler is 83. Actor John Karlen is 81. Basketball Hall-of-Famer Jerry West is 76. Actress Beth Howland is 73. Former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani is 70. Singer Gladys Knight is 70. Actress-director Sondra Locke is 70. Singer Billy Vera is 70. Singer John Fogerty is 69.

Country musician Jerry Douglas (Allison Krauss and Union Station) is 58. Actor Louis Mustillo is 56. U.S. Rep. Mark Sanford, R-S.C., is 54. Actor Brandon Cruz (TV: "The Courtship of Eddie's Father") is 52. Country singer Phil Vassar is 50. Actress Christa Miller is 50. Singer-musician Chris Ballew (Presidents of the USA) is 49. Rapper Chubb Rock is 46. Singer Kylie Minogue is 46. Actor Justin Kirk is 45. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., is 43. Olympic gold medal figure skater Ekaterina Gordeeva is 43. Television personality Elisabeth Hasselbeck is 37. Actor Jesse Bradford is 35. Actress Monica Keena is 35. Pop singer Colbie Caillat is 29. Actress Carey Mulligan is 29. Actor Joseph Cross is 28.

**Thought for Today:** "Time does not become sacred to us until we have lived it, until it has passed over us and taken with it a part of ourselves." — John Burroughs, American author and naturalist (1837-1921).

## FROM THE BIBLE

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis*



## More On Sweat Lodges

BY VINCE TWO EAGLES

Hau Mitakuepi (Greetings My Relatives),  
As promised, here is part two of two about the origins of one of our Seven Rites associated with the Sacred Pipe Religion of the Dakotah people — namely the Sweat Lodge or Inipi. This particular version of the Inipi origins is as it was told to Richard Erodes by the late John (Fire) Lame Deer and recorded in Richard's publication, "Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions." Perhaps you have heard a different version of the Sweat Lodge's origins; this doesn't mean the teller is wrong or right, it is simply their version and must be understood in that light. Many clans among the Great Sioux people have their own oral history of such things and each is to be respected as their respective truth as it was handed down in that particular clan. Having said that, here is the rez of the story:

*He thanked the rocks. He said, "You brought me here." He covered the lodge up so that no hot air could escape. It was dark inside; Stone Boy saw something moving in the darkness. The souls were returning to the bodies in their bundles. When he poured water over the rocks for the fourth time, his uncles came alive again. They started talking and singing. He told them, "The rocks saved me, and now they saved you. And from now on this sweat house shall be sacred to us. It will give us good health and will purify us." That was the first Inipi.*

*This story gives us a hint of how old the sweat bath is that it was the first of our many rites. It tells us about the sacredness of the stones which were the first things we worshiped. A sweat bath can serve as the first part of a larger ceremony, but it can also stand as a sacred rite by itself. There should be no Sioux family without their sweat lodge.*

*There is something holy and uplifting about the building of a sweat house. When two enemies participate in the putting up of the little beehive-shaped lodge, their old hatreds are forgotten. Envy and jealousy disappear. The two men laugh and josh each other; they joke about the fights they have had.*

*You start by looking for the right kind of rocks. You find them on the prairie and on the hills. They*

Vince  
TWO EAGLES

*are earth turned into stone, solid, dull. They are not shiny and sparkling. They are firm and hard, not brittle. They won't burst and hurt people inside the sweat lodge when they are red-hot. They are called bird stones — sintgala waksu — stones with "bead-work" on them. If you examine these rocks closely, you will see fine designs and tracings on them, greenish like moss. They don't last long, just about four days, then the designs fade and disappear. It is though that some birds put them on the stone. You can see the future in these designs. Once I heard an old man say, "I see a river here and a broken bridge. The water is overflowing. A flood is coming here." And so it happened. Besides the rocks, you collect firewood for the sweat bath. You use only cottonwood for this, because it is our most sacred tree.*

*You go down to the creek and cut twelve white willow trees. We peel these sticks and plant them in the ground in a circle. They are easy to bend. We form them like a beehive and tie them together in this shape. The sticks form a square at the top, representing the universe, the four directions. In some cases sixteen sticks are used. These willow wands form the skeleton of the hut. They are like the bones of our people. They are covered up. In the old days we covered them with buffalo hides; nowadays we use tarps, blankets or quilts. For the sun-dance sweat lodge we choose the best of our blankets with the most beautiful patterns. The finished sweat lodge reaches about as high as a man's ribs.*

*The sweat house is small, but to those crouching inside it represents the whole universe. The spirit of all living things are in this hut. This we believe. The earth on which we sit is our grandmother; all life comes from her. In the center of the lodge we scoop out a circular hole into which the stones will be put later. We pray to the Great Spirit as we do this ...*

*Lame Deer goes into great detail (pages 165-171 of his book) about the Sweat Lodge and other ceremonial practices. Again, remember this is his version of things; and you may or may not agree with his recalling of historical representations. They are none the less his own.*

*And now you know the rez of the story. Doksha (later) ...*

## Robert Reich

## Perils Of Hard-Charging Capitalism

BY ROBERT B. REICH

Tribune Content Agency

For years, Americans have assumed that our hard-charging capitalism is better than the soft-hearted version found in Canada and Europe. American capitalism might be a bit crueler, but it generates faster growth and higher living standards overall. Canada and Europe's "welfare-state socialism" is doomed.

It was a questionable assumption to begin with, relying to some extent on our collective amnesia about the first three decades after World War II, when tax rates on top incomes in the U.S. never fell below 70 percent, a larger portion of our economy was invested in education than ever before or since, over a third of our private-sector workers were unionized, we came up with Medicare for the elderly and Medicaid for the poor and built the biggest infrastructure project in history, known as the interstate highway system.

But then came America's big U-turn, when we deregulated, de-unionized, lowered taxes on the top earners, ended welfare and stopped investing as much of the economy in education and infrastructure.

Meanwhile, Canada and Europe continued on as before. Soviet communism went bust, and many of us assumed European and Canadian "socialism" would as well.

That's why recent data from the Luxembourg Income Study Database is so shocking.

The fact is, we're falling behind. While median per capita income in the United States has stagnated since 2000, it's up significantly in Canada and Northern Europe. Their typical worker's income is now higher than ours, and their disposable income — after taxes — higher still.

It's difficult to make exact comparisons of income across national borders because real purchasing power is hard to measure. But even if we assume Canadians and the citizens of several European nations have simply drawn even with the American middle class, they're doing better in many other ways.

Most of them get free health care and subsidized child care. And if they lose their jobs, they get far more generous unemployment benefits than we do. (In fact, right now, 75 percent of jobless Americans lack any unemployment benefits.)

If you think we make up for it by working less and getting paid more on an hourly basis, think again. There, at least three weeks paid vacation is the norm, along with paid sick leave and paid parental leave.

We're working an average of 4.6 percent more hours than the typical Canadian worker, 21

percent more than the typical French worker, and a whopping 28 percent more than your typical German worker, as *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof recently noted, citing data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

But at least Americans are more satisfied, aren't we? Not really. According to opinion surveys and interviews, Canadians and Northern Europeans are. They also live longer, their rate of infant mortality is lower and women in those countries are far less likely to die as result of complications in pregnancy or childbirth.

But at least we're the land of more equal opportunity, right? Wrong. Their poor kids have a better chance of getting ahead. While 42 percent of American kids born into poor families remain poor through their adult lives, only 30 percent of Britain's poor kids remain impoverished — and even smaller percentages in other rich countries.

Yes, the American economy continues to grow faster than the economies of Canada and Europe. But faster growth hasn't translated into higher living standards for most Americans.

Almost all of our economic gains have been going to the top — into corporate profits and the stock market (more than a third of whose value is owned by the richest 1 percent). And into executive pay (European CEOs take home far less than their American counterparts).

America's rich also pay much lower taxes than do the rich in Canada and Europe.

But surely Europe can't go on like this. You hear it all the time: They can no longer afford their welfare state.

That depends on what's meant by "welfare state." If high-quality education is included, we'd do well to emulate them. Americans between the ages of 16 and 24 rank near the bottom among rich countries in literacy and numeracy. That spells trouble for the U.S. economy in the future.

They're also doing more workforce training, and doing it better, than we are. The result is more skilled workers.

Universal health care is another part of their "welfare state" that saves them money because healthier workers are more productive.

So let's put ideology aside. The practical choice isn't between capitalism and "welfare-state socialism." It's between a system that's working for a few at the top and one that's working for just about everyone. Which would you prefer?

(Robert Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley and Senior Fellow at the Blum Center for Developing Economies. His new film, "Inequality for All," is now out on iTunes, DVD and On Demand.)

## YOUR LETTERS

## Vote Ravensborg

Paul Harens, Yankton

As a life-long Republican, I am watching the current June primary quite closely. Let's look at former Gov. Rounds. Here is a man that has served in the state Legislature and governor. He now wants to become a professional politician. He has raised millions of dollars, all outside South Dakota. He is NOT the one that should be selected. He was involved in the EB-5 mess (he

signed the last check). Due to the Rounds administration, Gov. Dugaard had to make huge cuts in education and all other aspects of the state government when he took office.

I would urge everyone to consider the one candidate for the position. He is the only one that is not a professional politician. I would urge all Republicans to vote for Jason Ravensborg, who has fought for our country! He earned the right to speak for our state.