



Writer's Block

Another Letter To Congress

BY WILLIAM KERR
For the Press & Dakotan

An open letter to Congress:
You know from polls of the recent past that you, the U.S. Congress, have lost the respect of the majority of our citizens by your lack of leadership.
But, you could retrieve that loss and even gain some admiration by becoming patriots once again similar to our forefathers who set up a form of government to benefit all citizens instead of just the rich few, and like the 1932 Congress that brought us out of the "Great Depression" (caused again by the rich few — Robber Barons — who kept all of the monetary benefits of "mass production" and held the workers to their bare survival level of income). It would take some real courage to make some dramatic changes in our economy, including giving up some of your exorbitant benefits to share the pain of the unemployed and underpaid workers (haven't received an increase in buying power since 1968), but achieve the goals of reducing our budget and of boosting our economy without spending a dime!

• First: Raise the minimum wage to \$12 and all of the millions added to everyone's pay who were earning below \$12 an hour, would immediately be spent as it is received on just cost of living and purchases put off, to the tune of approximately \$3 billion the first year!

• Second: Reduce the budget by the following:
1. Give up your platinum health care plan and use what is available to us. Or, as an alternative put everyone on Medicare (which has been paying its own way right through 2011) but with higher monthly premiums than retirees, say \$150 for single, \$250 for a couple and \$350 for a family. Then you could negotiate better prices for all 300 million of us on pharmaceuticals and medical care.

2. Give up your golden parachutes and use Social Security (which has also been paying its own way since inception) for your retirement plan and begin paying the Trust Fund back the \$2.6 trillion you have taken to make up for the loss of revenue each time you lowered income taxes for the rich.



William KERR

3. Increase income taxes for the rich immediately at least to 50 percent to 60 percent like most, if not all, of the other rich countries of the world, who are still in financial trouble even at those rates. That would help get us out of this "Great Recession" like it got us out of the Great Depression in the 1930s (with rates up to 90 percent) when unemployment was at 25 percent! No rich country can operate on our present income tax levels without penalizing their workers with starvation wages and few benefits.

4. Sell off your private jet fleet and begin using public transportation again like the rest of us. It would reduce transportation costs tremendously and keep you in better touch with the peoples wishes you are supposed to be legislating according to our constitution.

5. This may be the toughest to do. Share the pain of millions of our citizens by reducing your salaries to the pre-recession levels. The four raises you have given yourselves while millions of our citizens lost jobs and took lower pay, or part-time, to stay, and while our founding fathers must be rotating in their graves!

6. See if it is not possible to reduce your office expenses for the duration.

I am sure in my own mind that these changes would reduce our budget more than enough to avoid the coming 10 percent reduction which would just lose more jobs and give our economy another hit that would likely extend the recession more years yet! And, what a Christmas present this could make for our country and all of our citizens.

Now, dear reader, here is something inexpensive you can do for your country and maybe feel like a patriot. If you agree with, at least most of, these ideas PLEASE consider making copies of this article, sending them to your elected congress persons and including one copy in each of your Christmas cards. If a lot of these copies come to our elected representatives it might stimulate them to do something really helpful for us all.

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Lawmakers Should Stop Wasting Time

THE CULLMAN (Ala.) TIMES (Nov. 21): While the United States teeters on the financial cliff, more attention is being given to the lurid extramarital affairs of military and government leaders than the more pressing problems facing the nation.

Sure, there is concern that David Petraeus, as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, may have dropped a few secrets during his affair with the woman who penned his biography. And Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Sinclair's wife, Rebecca, has appeared on a television show to bemoan the Army life that leads husbands and wives to have affairs.

There's also the case of Gen. John Allen, who some officials accuse of sending suggestive emails to a Florida woman.

OK, we get it. The scum rises regularly in society. Men and women cheat, but other than those who are involved in these tangled affairs does anyone really care to know the details or care to listen to the shameless characters blubber about their shortcomings?

The American obsession with pitiful personal details is becoming absurd. Let's move a little closer to the fiscal cliff and focus on what economists warn could be an economic catastrophe at the turn of the year. ...

Vast amounts of time are wasted in Washington and by the media on learning the details of personal failures of high-profile characters. Once the garbage is spilled, not much of it has any real consequence concerning national security, and certainly no bearing on the state of the economy.

Congressional leaders have enjoyed plenty of recreation with the presidential election and all the trimmings that go with a year of campaigning. It's time now to turn away from the trappings of sensational stories and focus on the future of the country.

Fixing The Filibuster

THE SACRAMENTO (Calif.) BEE (Nov. 28): Popular notions of the U.S. Senate filibuster, the practice of talking bills to death or delaying their passage, tend to come from film, such as "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," or from legendary past examples. ...

In the past, senators actually had to stand on the floor and talk all day and all night to keep debate going. That naturally limited filibusters.

In the last decade, however, filibusters haven't worked that way. The Senate allows "silent" filibusters — the mere threat of a filibuster — to force the majority to assemble 60 votes to cut off debate and move legislation. These "pseudo-filibusters," or "obstructionism on the cheap," have turned the filibuster from a tool of last resort to a regular part of Senate procedure. ...

No longer do senators attempt to put together a majority coalition to carry the day. They threaten filibusters and the business of the Senate grinds to a halt.

This is not a hallowed tradition, but a clear abuse. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., used to oppose changes, but now supports reform.

"I think the rules have been abused, and we are going to work to change them," Reid said recently. "We will not do away with the filibuster, but we will make the Senate a more meaningful place. We are going to make it so we can get things done."

That's the right stance. ...

In our constitutional republic, the majority is supposed to rule, with checks and balances to prevent rash decisions. As Alexander Hamilton wrote in Federalist No. 22, "the fundamental maxim of republican government... requires that the sense of the majority should prevail."

By adopting changes to its rules, the Senate would assure that the minority could use the filibuster, but the will of the majority would prevail after a reasonable period of public deliberation — restoring the principle of majority rule.

SPEAK OUT!

Share your thoughts with us. Write to the PRESS & DAKOTAN on a topic of the day or in response to an editorial or story. Write us at: Letters, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078, drop off at 319 Walnut in Yankton, fax to 665-1721 or email to views@yankton.net.

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
Today is Thursday, Nov. 29, the 334th day of 2012. There are 32 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Nov. 29, 1952, President-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower secretly left on a trip to Korea, keeping his campaign promise to assess the ongoing conflict first-hand.

On this date: In 1530, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, onetime adviser to England's King Henry VIII, died.

In 1864, a Colorado militia killed at least 150 peaceful Cheyenne Indians in the Sand Creek Massacre.

In 1912, the Maryland Agricultural College, located in College Park, was destroyed by fire.

In 1924, Italian composer Giacomo Puccini died in Brussels before he could complete his opera "Turandot." (It was finished by Franco Alfano.)

In 1947, the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the partitioning of Palestine between Arabs and Jews.

In 1961, Enos the chimp was launched from Cape Canaveral aboard the Mercury-Atlas 5 spacecraft, which orbited earth twice before returning.

In 1967, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara announced he was leaving the Johnson administration to become president of the World Bank.

In 1972, the coin-operated video arcade game Pong, created by Atari, made its debut at Andy Capp's Tavern in Sunnyvale, Calif.

In 1981, actress Natalie Wood drowned in a boating accident off Santa Catalina Island, Calif., at age 43.

In 1986, actor Cary Grant died in Daventry, Iowa, at age 82.

In 1987, a Korean Air 707 jetliner en route from Abu Dhabi to Bangkok was destroyed by a bomb planted by North Korean agents with the loss of all 115 people aboard.

In 2001, George Harrison, the "quiet Beatle," died in Los Angeles following a battle with cancer; he was 58.

Ten years ago: The White House quietly announced that federal workers would get a smaller pay raise the following month because President George W. Bush was freezing part of the increase, citing the fight against terrorism. Celebrity publicist Lizzy Grubman left the Suffolk County, N.Y., jail after serving 37 days of a 60-day sentence for backing her sport utility vehicle into a crowd outside a trendy Hamptons nightclub and fleeing.

Five years ago: A court in Sudan con-

victed British teacher Gillian Gibbons of insulting Islam for letting her pupils name a teddy bear "Muhammad" and sentenced her to 15 days in prison. (Gibbons was pardoned after spending more than a week in custody; she then left the country.) Pakistan's president, Pervez Musharraf, embarked on a new, five-year term as a civilian president, a day after ceding the powerful post of army chief. Former Illinois Congressman Henry Hyde died in Chicago at age 83. Former General Motors chief executive Roger B. Smith died in Detroit at age 82.

One year ago: Eurozone ministers sent Greece an 8 billion-euro (\$10.7 billion) Christmas rescue package to stem an immediate cash crisis. Hard-line Iranian protesters stormed British diplomatic compounds in what began as an apparent state-approved show of anger over the latest Western sanctions to punish Tehran for its nuclear program. American Airlines' parent company, AMR Corp., filed for bankruptcy protection, citing high labor and fuel costs and the weak economy.

Today's Birthdays: Hall-of-Fame sportscaster Vin Scully is 85. Former French President Jacques Chirac is 80. Blues singer-musician Jimmy Mayall is 79. Actress Diane Ladd is 77. Composer-musician Chuck Mangione is 72. Country singer Jody Miller is 71. Pop singer-musician Felix Cavaliere (The Rascals) is 70. Olympic skier Suzy Chaffee is 66. Comedian Garry Shandling is 63. Actor Jeff Fahey is 60. Movie director Joel Coen is 58. Actor-comedian-celebrity judge Howie Mandel is 57. Homeland Security Director Janet Napolitano is 55. The mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel, is 53. Actress Cathy Moriarty is 52. Actress Kim Delaney is 51. Actor Tom Sizemore is 51. Actor Andrew McCarthy is 50. Actor Don Cheadle is 48. Actor-producer Neill Barry is 47. Musician Wallis Buchanan is 47. Pop singer Jonathan Knight (New Kids on the Block) is 44. Rock musician Marlin Carr (Boo Radleys) is 44. Actress Jennifer Elise Cox is 43. Actor Larry Joe Campbell is 42. Rock musician Frank Delgado (Deftones) is 42. Actress Paola Turbay is 42. Actress Gena Lee Nolin is 41. Actor Brian Baumgartner is 40. Actress Anna Farris is 36. Actor Julian Ovenden is 36. Gospel singer James Fortune is 35. Rapper The Game is 33. Rock musician Ringo Starkey is 31. Actor Lucas Black is 30.

Thought for Today: "Statistics can prove anything — even the truth." — Sir Noel Moynihan, British physician and writer (1916-1994).

FROM THE BIBLE

Man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

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A Life Lesson From Jell-O

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.
Tribune Media Services

Bing Crosby would be appalled.
With singer Carol Richards, the great crooner once popularized a song, "Silver Bells," about the joy of Christmas shopping. "Strings of street lights," it went, "even stop lights, blink a bright red and green as the shoppers rush home with their treasures."
Of course, that was in 1950, a more genteel era when men still wore hats and women still wore gloves. These days, one would be well-advised to wear Kevlar.
In 2008, a Walmart worker named Jdimytai Damour was trampled to death by a mob of holiday shoppers who broke down the doors of a store in Valley Stream, N.Y. In 2011 a woman in Los Angeles used pepper spray on a group of shoppers vying for video game consoles. That pleasant chore of holiday shopping about which Crosby sang has long since mutated into an annual ritual of mass psychosis called Black Friday.
About the best that can be said of this year's Black Friday is that nobody died. Two people were shot in Tallahassee, Fla., in what police say was a dispute over a parking space. In San Antonio, a man allegedly cut the line and punched a guy who complained. The guy who was punched pulled a gun. In Moultrie, Ga., there was a near riot over cellphones. In Sacramento, Calif., a man threatened to stab anybody who pushed his kids.
And as people were thus celebrating the season of thanksgiving, redemption and light, the Rev. Nancy was saying grace over two cups of Jell-O.
She is my pastor's mother, a preacher in her own right, who took ill on Thanksgiving eve and had to be rushed to the emergency room. She spent the holiday in the hospital and her son was so moved by watching her give thanks for Jell-O that he preached about it Sunday.
Maybe you say to yourself, well, yeah, but what is Jell-O to be thankful for? Especially when everybody else is gorging on turkey and ham and dressing and greens and mac and cheese and pies and cakes?
But when your last meal was intravenous, Jell-O is quite a lot.
This is not a church, so there will be no sermon, only an observation that, whatever one's belief structure or lack thereof, there is something to be said for



Leonard PITTS

learning to be content in the face of circumstances you cannot change.
Otherwise, you are in for a bumpy ride through this life.
Folks forget that sometimes. Heck, folks forget it all the time.
"The trouble with you and me, my friend," Don Henley once sang, "is the trouble with this nation. Too many blessings, too little appreciation."
Or as the serenity prayer puts it: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."
Such sentiments are necessarily at odds with the cult of consumption and its belief that one is incomplete until one buys what the store is selling, that one can change one's entire life, find wholeness and a better self, in the things one owns. It is a faith — the word is used advisedly — that finds expression each year in scenes of people surging into temples of commerce, pulling guns and getting into fistfights while trying to buy things they feel they need.
But the things we need most in this life cannot be found in temples of commerce or bought at any price. Did more of us know that, back in the era when men still wore hats and women gloves? Maybe. Or maybe that's just a trick of memory, painting olden days in sepia tones.
So fine. No olden days; no sepia tones here. But you don't have to go back to 1950 to marvel at how some of us define what matters in this life. You can just go back to last week, to a holiday weekend some folks spent camping at the mall and punching one another in the face — and at least one of us spent in a hospital bed giving thanks for Jell-O. Something in that juxtaposition makes you want to pause, reconfigure your ideas of what truly matters in this life and what, ultimately, does not. Perhaps that's only to be expected when a woman is able to locate grace in a gelatin snack as the shoppers rush home with their treasures.
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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YOUR LETTERS

Threats And Guts

Fernande Colette Bitsos, Yankton
Thank you, Kelly Hertz, for having the guts to express your freedom of speech in regard to secession gossips and threats from those red states having a hard time to swallow a bitter pill ("A Line Of Secession," Press & Dakotan, Nov. 24). After more than 60

years of living in the USA, from Truman to Obama, what is happening to this beautiful and majestic country?
I praise you for what you wrote and hope it will filter in the brains of all decent Americans, whether Republicans, Democrats or Independents to keep our "Fifty States" along with our Star-Spangled Banner.