

## THE PRESS &amp; DAKOTAN

THE DAKOTAS' OLDEST NEWSPAPER | FOUNDED 1861

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## OPINION | OUR VIEW

## The Shutdown: Political Hostages

The federal government shutdown that went into effect late Monday night is an exercise in political stupidity of the highest order. It brings our nation's government to a grinding halt, resulting in furloughs for potentially hundreds of thousands of workers, disrupted services on myriad levels and the threat of hurting tens of millions of Americans across the country. And for good measure, it makes us look like a laughingstock in the eyes of the world.

Thus, our government really appears to be the dysfunctional disaster that its critics always declare it to be.

Of course, it doesn't help that many of those critics are also lawmakers — i.e., they ARE part of the government.

There is usually a ton of blame to spread around when Washington behaves badly, but in this instance, the Republicans, particularly in the U.S. House, richly deserve to own most of this mess. And they are getting the kind of limited, shackled government they apparently want.

The crux of the matter, the Republicans say today, is Obamacare, which went online Tuesday with the signup period beginning for the exchanges. To make a budget deal, House Republicans were demanding, first, the defunding of Obamacare, and then the delay of the healthcare reform program for one year, most likely while they devise other ways to sabotage the act. Never mind that the Affordable Care Act was passed by Congress in 2010 and ultimately ruled constitutional by the Supreme Court. Or that President Obama, who was "saddled" with this apparently onerous piece of legislation during the 2012 election, somehow won re-election by a relatively comfortable margin.

However, the Obamacare angle is only a recent spotlight in this particular shutdown scenario. Back on May 7, the *Washington Post* reported that House Budget Committee Chairman Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), faced with the government harvesting higher revenues amid declining red ink, suggested that the GOP needed to create some new leverage in order to again push for its signature budgetary demands. In the *Post* article, which was titled "As Red Ink Recedes, Pressure Fades For Budget Deal," Ryan cited entitlement reform, tax reform and the debt ceiling as his main targets. No mention of the Affordable Care Act was specifically made.

The only way to get that leverage, it now appears, was to play chicken with the specter of a government shutdown, presumably with the debt ceiling (which is still to come). But Obamacare works fine, too.

The GOP offers a different interpretation of the current reality. A Republican talking point we've heard for the last several weeks is that the shutdown is actually Obama's fault because he won't negotiate with the Republicans, who — in regards to healthcare, at least — have made it clear they find the Affordable Care Act completely unacceptable, with many of them vowing to gut the legislation by any means necessary. That mindset doesn't seem to offer much room for negotiation now. One Republican politician, pitching this logic to us, said he believed it's the president who really wanted this government shutdown.

In a way, that theory is like saying this: Suppose someone comes up to you, points a gun in your face and demands all your money. You say no and resist, and the gunman shoots you. He then claims that the incident is *your* fault because you wouldn't negotiate with him and that you really wanted the incident to happen, as demonstrated by your unwillingness to "compromise."

That's basically what we have here.

One thing all this *does* point out is that government, in the hands of these lawmakers, really doesn't work: What we're seeing now isn't governing, it isn't leadership and it isn't for the greater good. It's just political hostage-taking, and it doesn't seem to matter who gets hurt in the process.

And that truly is embarrassing.

kmh

## ON THIS DATE

## By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, Oct. 2, the 275th day of 2013. There are 90 days left in the year.

**Today's Highlight in History:** On Oct. 2, 1967, Thurgood Marshall was sworn in as an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court as the court opened its new term.

**On this date:** In 1780, British spy John Andre was hanged in Tappan, N.Y., during the Revolutionary War.

In 1835, the first battle of the Texas Revolution fought Mexican soldiers near the Guadalupe River; the Mexicans ended up withdrawing.

In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson suffered a serious stroke at the White House that left him paralyzed on his left side.

In 1941, during World War II, German armies launched an all-out drive against Moscow.

In 1944, Nazi troops crushed the two-month-old Warsaw Uprising, during which a quarter of a million people were killed.

In 1950, the comic strip "Peanuts," created by Charles M. Schulz, was syndicated to seven newspapers.

In 1958, the former French colony of Guinea in West Africa proclaimed its independence.

In 1970, one of two chartered twin-engine planes flying the Wichita State University football team to Utah crashed into a mountain near Silver Plume, Colo., killing 31 of the 40 people on board.

In 1971, the music program "Soul Train" made its debut in national syndication.

In 1985, actor Rock Hudson died at his home in Beverly Hills, Calif., at age 59 after battling AIDS.

In 2001, NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson said the United States had provided "clear and conclusive" evidence of Osama bin Laden's involvement in the attacks on New York and Washington.

In 2002, the Washington, D.C. area sniper attacks began as a resident of Silver Spring, Md., was shot and killed in a store parking lot in Wheaton; the next day, five people were shot dead, setting off a frantic manhunt lasting three weeks.

In 2006, an armed milk truck driver took a group of girls hostage in an Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Pa., killing five of them and wounding five others before committing suicide.

**Ten years ago:** The Los Angeles Times published allegations that California gubernatorial candidate Arnold Schwarzenegger had sexually harassed six women in the past; the actor acknowledged "bad behavior" on his part, and apologized. The House voted 281-142 to prohibit doctors from carrying out what abortion opponents called partial birth abortion. South

African J.M. Coetzee won the 2003 Nobel Prize for literature. Former Labor Secretary John Dunlop died at age 89.

**Five years ago:** Republican Sarah Palin and Democrat Joe Biden sparred over taxes, energy policy and the Iraq war in a high-profile vice-presidential debate at Washington University in St. Louis, in which Palin sought to reclaim her identity as a feisty reformer and Biden tried to undercut the maverick image of GOP presidential hopeful John McCain. More than a year after millionaire adventure Steve Fossett vanished on a solo flight over California's rugged Sierra Nevada, searchers found the wreckage of his plane but no body inside. (Fossett's remains were discovered in late Oct. 2008.)

**One year ago:** Vice President Joe Biden said the middle class had been "buried" during the last four years, a statement that Republicans immediately seized upon as an unwitting indictment of the Obama administration. A judge in Pennsylvania ruled that the state's tough new voter identification requirement could not be enforced in the upcoming presidential election.

**Today's Birthdays:** Country singer-musician Leon Rausch (Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys) is 86. Retired MLB All-Star Maury Wills is 81. Movie critic Rex Reed is 75. Singer-songwriter Don McLean is 68. Cajun/country singer Jo-el Sonnier is 67. Actor Avery Brooks is 65. Fashion designer Donna Karan is 65. Photographer Annie Leibovitz is 64. Rock musician Mike Rutherford (Genesis, Mike & the Mechanics) is 63. Singer-actor Sting is 62. Actress Lorraine Bracco is 59. Country musician Greg Jennings (Restless Heart) is 59. Rock singer Phil Oakey (The Human League) is 58. Rhythm-and-blues singer Freddie Jackson is 55. Retro-soul singer James Hunter is 51. Rock musician Bud Gaugh (Sublime, Eyes Adrift) is 46. Folk-country singer Gillian Welch is 46. Country singer Kelly Willis is 45. Actor Joey Slotnick is 45. Rhythm-and-blues singer Dion Allen (Az Yet) is 43. Actress-talk show host Kelly Ripa (TV: "Live with Kelly and Michael") is 43. Singer Tiffany is 42. Rock singer Lene Nystrom is 40. Actor Efron Ramirez is 40. Rhythm-and-blues singer LaTocha Scott (Xscape) is 40. Gospel singer Mandisa (TV: "American Idol") is 37. Actress Brianna Brown is 34. Rock musician Mike Rodden (Hinder) is 31. Rock singer Brittany Howard (Alabama Shakes) is 25. Actress Samantha Barks is 23.

**Thought for Today:** "There's one way to find out if a man is honest — ask him. If he says 'yes,' you know he is crooked." — Groucho Marx (born this date in 1890, died in 1977).

## FROM THE BIBLE

*From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.*

*Matthew 11:12.* Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis



## Washington Bullies

BY ROBERT B. REICH

Tribune Content Agency

As a child I was bullied by bigger boys who threatened to beat me up if I didn't give them what they wanted. But every time I gave in to their demands, their subsequent demands grew larger. First they wanted the change in my pocket. Next it was the dessert in my lunchbox. Then my new Davy Crockett cap. Then the softball and bat I got for my birthday.

Finally I stopped giving in. When the bullies began roughing me up on the playground, some older boys came to my rescue and threatened my tormentors with black eyes if they ever touched me again. That ended their extortion racket.

What's happening in Washington these days may seem far removed from my boyhood memories, but Washington is really just another children's playground. Its current bullies are right-wing Republicans, now threatening that if they don't get their way they'll close down the government and cause the nation to default on its debts.

"The American people don't want a government shutdown, and they don't want Obamacare," House Republican leaders said in a statement over the weekend. "We will do our job and send this bill over, and then it's up to the Senate to pass it and stop a government shutdown."

Really? The American people don't want Obamacare as much as I didn't want my softball and bat.

OK, maybe not quite as much. But the only settled way we know what the American people want is through the democratic process. And the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) is the law of the land. A majority of the House and Senate voted for it, the president signed it into law, its constitutionality has been upheld by the Supreme Court, and a majority of Americans re-elected the president after an election battle in which the Affordable Care Act was a central issue.

Moreover, we don't repeal laws in this country by holding hostage the entire government of the United States.

The bullies are a faction inside the Republican Party — extremists who are threatening



Robert REICH

more reasonable Republicans with primary challenges if they don't go along.

And where are the Tea Party extremists getting their dough? From even bigger bullies — a handful of hugely wealthy Americans who are sinking hundreds of millions of dollars into this extortion racket.

They include David and Charles Koch (and their front group, Americans for Prosperity); Peter Thiel, leverage-buyout specialist John Childs, investor Howie Rich, and executives of JPMorgan and Goldman Sachs, all behind the Club for Growth; and Crow Holdings' Harlan Crow, shipping magnate Richard Uihlein, investment banker Foster Friess, executives of MetLife and Philip Morris, and foundations controlled by the Scaife family, all bankrolling FreedomWorks.

Their game plan is to not just to take over the Republican Party; it's to take over America. The shutdown over the budget and the debt ceiling is a prelude to 2016, when they plan to run Texas Sen. Ted Cruz for president. (Cruz, if you haven't noticed, is busily establishing his cred as the biggest flamethrower in Washington — orchestrating not only the current extortion but also the purge of reasonable Republicans from the GOP.)

Obama and the Democrats must not give in. They shouldn't even negotiate with extortionists. As I learned the hard way, giving in to bullies just encourages them to escalate their demands.

The president began negotiations with the Republican bullies in 2011, when they first threatened to default on the nation's debt if they didn't get the spending cuts they wanted. He negotiated again at the end of 2012, when they threatened to go over the fiscal cliff and take the rest of the nation with them if they didn't get the budget they wanted. Now they want to repeal a law they detest. If he gives in again, what's next? A coup d'etat?

*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. His new film, "Inequality for All," will be out September 27. He blogs at www.robertreich.org.*

## YOUR LETTERS

## Trash Can Alternatives

Julie K. Jansen, Yankton

In response to Fernande Colette Bitsos letter (*Press & Dakotan*, Sept. 24):

I believe, Fernande, that it is possible that some people put sealed bags on the curb, as they have tried sealed cans and refuse to buy a new can just to replace the lid that was destroyed when the collector left it on the ground. (The reason for your letter.)

I, for one, have a rack. This allows the collector to place both can and lid in a secure place, allowing myself and others to drive through town without being forced to play "dodge can".

I like to think that racks save collectors time and perhaps the city a few pennies.

I realize that passing ordinances can be a great source of satisfaction. However, Fernande, I would think that a Peace Corps-minded person such as yourself would be itching for a hands-on, community helping, project and would have like-minded friends ready to jump on board! Perhaps you know a young adult desiring an Eagle Scout project.

I would think a person could make some lightweight can carts, sell a few and give away a few to people on fixed incomes. I would try using PVC pipe.

As for me, I am 70 percent capitalist. However, the 70 percent allows the 30 percent to donate supplies! At least a few.

P.S. Fern, feel free to keep the first one.

## Cruz Hams It Up

Fred Bender, Yankton

I heard on the radio an excerpt from Sen. Ted Cruz's filibuster in the Senate last week

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