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Writer's Block

The Veteran's Lament

BY WILLIAM KERR
P&D Correspondent

When I read about some candidate, or incumbent, speaking about reducing the compensation paid to veterans (which they wrongly refer to as "veteran's pensions") to help pay down our national debt, it makes me angrier than anything else I can think of — except maybe someone trying to intentionally harm my family or friends. Whoever first said "It makes your blood boil" got it slightly wrong. It makes my emotions boil!

I never really thought about the question of why infantry basic training lasted for 18 weeks until sometime after the war was over. I had completed my college education and was out working, marrying and starting a family.

Learning to proficiently recognize and salute officers; perform close order drills; fire weapons; throw grenades accurately; try to kill someone with a bayonet (while they are doing the same towards you); dig good fox-holes; survive 10-mile marches; understand and carry out squad, platoon or company tactics; go without hot meals, baths or sleep for long periods; and learn the tactics of survival for when the power of exploding shells knocks you about and bullets and shell fragments are filling the air and ground didn't take that long at all. What really took that long was to burn in all of those skills so firmly that you could perform them all while being scared to death every moment of the action, while seeing some of your comrades fall wounded or killed next to you, sometimes with their blood pouring out of horrible wounds, but most often just collapsing like a puppet whose strings are cut and be able to continue fighting at peak performance with every skill you have learned! (The Hollywood



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version doesn't near get it.)

I don't know what it is like to be confined inside a tank, or be onboard a fighting ship at sea with no land in sight or in an airplane with no soft landing available if you're hit during combat because I haven't experienced those situations. But I do expect its horrors to be every bit as difficult to endure. And those who have served supporting those in combat have still risked being put in the same danger in the event of an emergency, like our regimental band and others during the Battle of the Bulge, who were handed rifles and sent to us as replacements, without having had the benefit of 18 weeks of infantry training!

Then, after the action, you see the rubble of damaged and blown-up buildings, frightened civilians looking at you thinking you are going to shoot them any minute, and the dead fenced-in domestic animals, who never had a chance against artillery shells, lying on the ground with feet in the air.

There is no way to adequately communicate the horrors of war to someone who has not experienced them.

But, our veterans, who made it possible for you to NOT have to have similar experiences need to be respected better than even considering reducing their compensation for disabilities received during military service!

Those who do express such an unappreciative and immoral move as reducing veterans' compensation before eliminating the private jet airliners, golden parachutes and platinum health care for our elected leaders; subsidies to oil companies and raising taxes for the rich (which got us out of the Great Depression), I consider to be cowardly, traitorous thieves!

What's After 'Hope And Change'?

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.
Tribune Media Services

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — In Dante Alighieri's "Divine Comedy," the narrator is conveyed to the gates of hell, upon which he finds a sign: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

This city is not hell. But a case can be made, as the Democratic Party convenes here to nominate Barack Obama to a second term, that the same admonition applies. Abandon hope.

And change.

Hope and change, of course, were the promises by which Obama swept into office four years ago, heralding a "post partisan" era in which Republicans and Democrats would work together in solving the nation's problems. We all know how that turned out. The GOP lurched further to the right, driven by a "tea party" that scorned compromise, the ordinary horse trading that defines politics, as traitorous and weak.

There was an element of fanaticism there that one watched with a kind of awestruck horror, unable to believe that what you were seeing was really real. But it was. They actually did take the economy hostage, actually did vote down their own major bill because the president supported it. They actually did declare war on objective fact, bow to a ludicrously rigid anti-tax pledge, abridge the religious freedoms of Muslims, commit acts of voter suppression, require Latinos to show their papers. The great Clint Eastwood actually did stumble through a dialogue with an empty chair that was supposed to represent the president. And yes, they actually did call that president "uppity," a "boy," and a "secret Muslim," actually did question his birthplace and academic credentials, actually did accuse him of being a radical socialist out to destroy America.

They actually did.

Three years ago, a distraught woman at a health-care protest cried out, "I want my country back!" Better she should demand her party back. The party of Lincoln, Eisenhower and Reagan doesn't seem like a party at all anymore, but a cult.

Yes, that's just the sort of observation you'd expect



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from a liberal hack, Democratic Party shill and assorted other epithets by which GOP true believers routinely ward off questions about their true belief. But let them note that similar concerns are being voiced by GOP stalwarts like former Indiana Sen. Richard Lugar and former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Indeed Barack Obama seems to have been the last person in America to understand how things have changed, to realize that there can be no bipartisan problem solving because the GOP has decided it has no problem bigger than him: black, funny name, center-left leaning him, and all that his elevation to the presidency portends for a changing nation and for a political party that, in that changing nation, remains whiter than polar bears in snow.

So we don't hear so much about hope and change anymore. The president has lately been more prone to unilateral action and has taken the wood to Mitt Romney in attacks as negative and misleading as those that are leveled against him.

It is always gratifying to see the bullied kid finally stand up for himself.

But what happens then?

That is the question Obama and his party must answer this week. This is not an election about big government versus small or more taxes versus less, but, rather, about reason versus unreason, coherence versus incoherence, tomorrow versus a yesterday that never really was, that exists only in sepia-colored GOP fictions.

To win the election, Obama needs 270 electoral votes. But to deserve to win it, he needs to articulate a tough-minded new vision about how to shepherd America into a challenging future some of us plainly fear. The sweet platitudes of four years ago will not do. Instead, Obama must answer a stark and simple question:

What now? What do you do after hope and change have failed?

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YOUR LETTERS

HSC Complex Is Vital

John Keyes, Yankton

I am writing to comment on the article in the *Press & Dakotan* (Aug. 22) on the sports facility needs. I believe it would be a waste to tear up the current soccer fields at HSC. They are premium fields and there were many donations and much love from many people who helped to make them what they are today.

There is plenty of room on the HSC ground to build a very nice sports complex. I would rather see the ground used for a sports complex than to be cannibalized for future businesses to build on. There is property to the north, east and west for commercial expansion.

A sports complex will draw people to town and help our tax base. Hotels and restaurants are close to that corner too. Please give serious consideration to this option.

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

The Voters Deserve A Little Honesty

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE (Aug. 31): In the heat of battle this presidential election year, accusations are flying from both campaigns of lies, half-truths and contradictions. Yet, the candidates no longer show contrition when a statement is unmasked as a distortion or an out-and-out lie. Instead, they accuse the media of spin.

Can we run a democracy free of (apparently) bothersome facts? Romney pollster Neil Newhouse, responding to media objections to a Romney campaign ad that falsely claimed the president had eliminated work and job training requirements for welfare beneficiaries, declared: "We're not going to let our campaign be dictated by fact-checkers."

Distortions have long been part of electioneering. The news media saw their job as calling out false statements and contextual inaccuracies. Yet, as reporting seemed to have less and less effect on how the candidates conducted their campaigns, journalists became more aggressive. They began abandoning the he-said-she-said-let-the-reader-decide construction in favor of boldly calling out "lies, half-truths and contradictions" (as we say in *The Chronicle*)...

For their attempts to preserve a functioning democracy, media now are the object of partisans' scorn, and voters seem not to care.

How else do you explain Paul Ryan's convention speech, where he shamelessly offered up five brazen deceptions: about the closing of the GM plant in Janesville, Wis., about Medicare, about the deficit, about the downgrading of U.S. debt, and about retaining the safety net for the poor.

Or Romney's convention statement President Barack Obama began his presidency "with an apology tour"?

Not that the Obama campaign has the corner on the truth. Scrutiny there has revealed statements as distortions or half-truths, too.

The result: Voters are disgusted, and low voter turnout is forecast for the November election.

Science tells us voters are drawn more to candidates who share their values than they are persuaded by facts, but what voter values dishonesty? Voters of both parties should demand better of their candidates.

Weighing The Nation's Debt

THE HAWK EYE, Burlington, Iowa (Sept. 4): Albert Einstein is credited with observing compound interest as the most powerful force in the universe.

"He who understands it, earns it; he who doesn't, pays it," he continued. Right now, America understands compound interest yet is paying for it, too.

At \$15.595 trillion, U.S. debt this year exceeded the country's Gross Domestic Product. To be sure, that's an alarming figure. Republicans made hay of it at their convention — as well they should.

In 2000, the first year of President George W. Bush's term, debt as it compared to GDP swung from plus 57.7 percent to 57.8 percent in the red. Then we cut taxes twice and went to war twice.

The first war in Afghanistan has cost us \$561 billion and promises to remain expensive even after troops leave in 2014. Meanwhile the war in Iraq, now generally viewed as wholly unnecessary, cost \$806 billion and still requires massive amounts of money.

All of it's borrowed.

Debt piled up during Bush's administration from 57.8 percent of GDP to 74.1 percent. Anyone familiar with how compounding interest works knows how that curve will soar — especially when expenses continue to exceed income.

In the past four years, those numbers have marched steadily and unsurprisingly upward: 86.4, 95.1, 98.7 and 101.7 percent of GDP. (Japan's debt-to-GDP ratio is 220 percent, and see where that country is.) ...

There's plenty of blame to go around. ... Democrats and Republicans both failed to recognize where the country was going.

Cutting taxes seemed like a good idea when the Treasury was full. But that was before 9/11, and the budget was not tweaked when the country marched off to war. Then the ultra-expensive bank meltdown hit. ...

The fact Barack Obama and Mitt Romney are running neck and neck shows Americans are more savvy about how we arrived at this point than politicians give them credit. ...

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, Sept. 6, the 250th day of 2012. There are 116 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Sept. 6, 1997, a public funeral was held for Princess Diana at Westminster Abbey in London, six days after her death in a car crash in Paris.

On this date: In 1757, the Marquis de Lafayette, the French hero of the American Revolution, was born in Auvergne, France. In 1861, Union forces led by Gen. Ulysses S. Grant occupied Paducah, Ky., during the Civil War.

In 1901, President William McKinley was shot and mortally wounded by anarchist Leon Czolgosz at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, N.Y. (McKinley died eight days later.)

In 1916, the first self-service grocery store, Piggy Wiggly, was opened in Memphis, Tenn., by Clarence Saunders.

In 1939, the Union of South Africa declared war on Germany.

In 1948, Princess Juliana of the Netherlands was inaugurated as queen, two days after the abdication of her mother, Queen Wilhelmina.

In 1952, Canadian television broadcasting began in Montreal.

In 1966, South African Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd was stabbed to death by an apparently deranged page during a parliamentary session in Cape Town.

In 1970, Palestinian guerrillas seized control of three U.S.-bound jetliners. (Two were later blown up on the ground in Jordan, along with a London-bound plane hijacked on Sept. 9; the fourth plane was destroyed on the ground in Egypt. No hostages were harmed.)

In 1972, a memorial service was held at the site of the Summer Olympics in Munich, West Germany, a day after the deadly terrorist attack that had claimed the lives of eleven Israelis and five of their abductors.

In 1985, all 31 people aboard a Midwest Express Airlines DC-9 were killed when the Atlanta-bound jetliner crashed just after takeoff from Milwaukee's Mitchell Field.

In 1991, the Soviet Union recognized the independence of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Russian lawmakers upheld a decision by residents of Leningrad to restore the city's pre-revolutionary name, St. Petersburg.

Ten years ago: Meeting outside Washington, D.C. for only the second time since 1800, Congress convened in New York to

pay homage to the victims and heroes of September 11.

Five years ago: President George W. Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao, in Sydney, Australia, for an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, called for greater international cooperation in tackling climate change without stifling economic growth. Death claimed opera superstar Luciano Pavarotti in Modena, Italy, at age 71 and author Madeleine L'Engle ("A Wrinkle in Time") in Litchfield, Conn., at age 88.

One year ago: A man with a rifle opened fire in an IHOP restaurant in Carson City, Nev., killing three of five uniformed National Guard members and a woman having breakfast with her husband; gunman Eduardo Sencion also shot himself and died in the parking lot. Convoys of Moammar Gadhafi loyalists, including his security chief, fled Libya, crossing the Sahara into Niger.

Today's Birthdays: Comedian JoAnne Worley is 75. Country singer David Allan Coe is 73. Rock singer-musician Roger Waters (Pink Floyd) is 69. Actress Swoosie Kurtz is 68. Comedian-actress Jane Curtin is 65. Country singer-songwriter Buddy Miller is 60. Country musician Joe Smyth (Sawyer Brown) is 55. Actor-comedian Jeff Foxworthy is 54. Actor-comedian Michael Winslow is 54. Rock musician Perry Barmonte is 52. Actor Steven Eckholdt is 51. Rock musician Scott Travis (Judas Priest) is 51. Pop musician Pat Waaktaar (a-ha) is 51. New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie is 50. Rock musician Kevin Miller is 50. ABC News correspondent Elizabeth Vargas is 50. Country singer Mark Chesnut is 49. Actress Betsy Russell is 49. Actress Rosie Perez is 48. Rhythm and blues singer Macy Gray is 45. Singer CeCe Peniston is 43. Rhythm-and-blues singer Darryl Anthony (Az Yet) is 43. Actress Daniele Gaiher is 42. Rock singer Dolores O'Riordan (The Cranberries) is 41. Actor Dylan Bruno is 40. Actor Idris Elba is 40. Actress Justina Machado is 40. Actress Anika Noni Rose is 40. Rock singer Nina Persson (The Cardigans) is 38. Actor Justin Whalin is 38. Actress Naomie Harris is 36. Rapper Noreaga is 35. Actress Natalia Cigliuti is 34. Rapper Foxy Brown is 34. Rock singer Max George (The Wanted) is 24.

Thought for Today: "It is a good rule in life never to apologize. The right sort of people do not want apologies, and the wrong sort take a mean advantage of them." — P.G. Wodehouse, English author (1881-1975).

FROM THE BIBLE

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. John 15:5. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

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