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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Preserve Retirement System's Viability

WATERTOWN PUBLIC OPINION (Sept. 11): The South Dakota Retirement System's board of trustees recently began talks to consider making changes in the state's retirement system. The trustees are considering the changes because the system's benefits are overly generous, especially for early retirees, and the State Investment Council isn't able to produce the earnings necessary to keep the system in financial balance.

One change has already been made. Trustees adopted a lower annual target for rate of return on investments. Effective July 1, 2013, the target will be reduced to 7.25 percent from the current 7.75 percent. The 7.25 percent would be used for the next five years, then move to 7.5 percent in 2018. What that boils down to is trustees believe earnings expectations will be lower for the next few years and that means benefits and expenses will have to be reduced. Suggestions to accomplish that include raising the normal retirement age to 67, raising the early retirement age to 57 and adding five years to the formula for determining eligibility for special early retirement, so that a person would need a combination equaling 90 years in age and years of service instead of the current 85.

Given the problems nationwide with government pension programs, South Dakota's system is in pretty good shape. Trustees want to make these changes to head off problems in the future, based on overly optimistic return percentages. That gives us comfort knowing the system will continue to be supported by those investing each month instead of coming to the Legislature's general fund and begging for a bailout from all taxpayers.

Looking at the state retirement system two things become obvious. First, increasing the retirement age means people/pensioners drawing on the system are living longer. That, in turn, means more money needs to be pumped into the system, both from those working and from fund investments, to ensure adequate funding so the pension system can meet its obligations.

South Dakota's public pension system has more than 74,000 members and their families. To make sure their future needs are met, the system has to take steps periodically to make sure it will have the money on hand to meet those obligations. The goal of the system is to be self-sustaining and that's the way it should be. The last thing anyone wants to see is the taxpayers having to pitch in to keep the system afloat, as what's happening in numerous states across the country.

Gas Prices And Ethanol

KEARNEY (Neb.) HUB (Sept. 4): Here's a useful fact that will make you sound like a conversational genius at the next cocktail party. When talk turns to the high cost of gasoline, remind everyone that for every billion gallons of ethanol added to the nation's fuel supply, gasoline prices are reduced by six cents.

That swell little fact is courtesy of Louisiana State University, and it's worth remembering, not just because it could make you popular at social gatherings, but also because it underscores the value of adding alternate energy sources to our nation's portfolio.

Whether it's wind turbines, solar panels, ethanol or a source that's yet to be developed, we're all better off when we can offset traditional energy sources with new alternative energy.

For example, wind turbines might be expensive to build, but the wind is free and clean. Megawatts of wind-generated electricity enter the grid without burning an ounce of coal or any fossil fuel.

That's good for the environment. Blending ethanol is good for the pocketbook. A study by the Center for Agricultural Development shows ethanol production helped to reduce wholesale gasoline prices by an average of \$1.09 per gallon in 2011, saving each U.S. family about \$1,200 at the pump last year. Burning blends of 10 percent or more ethanol offsets the need to import petroleum and conduct costly and environmentally risky exploration for oil here in the United States.

On a more personal level, the offsetting effect of ethanol helps deaden the sting of news like we heard while Hurricane Isaac was battering the Gulf Coast. While coastal Americans were battered down for the big blow, tankers were unable to offload their cargoes of foreign oil.

Hurricane Isaac shut down nearly 95 percent of oil production and a million barrels a day of refining capacity in the Gulf region, but the resulting spike in gasoline prices might have been worse if not for the diluting effects of ethanol.

The homegrown fuel is helping to stabilize gas prices, even when severe weather interrupts the flow of imported oil.

TODAY IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
 Today is Monday, Sept. 17, the 261st day of 2012. There are 105 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Sept. 17, 1862, more than 3,600 men were killed, many more wounded, captured or left missing, in the Civil War Battle of Antietam in Maryland; although the battle itself proved inconclusive, it effectively halted the Confederates' advance into Maryland.

On this date: In 1787, the Constitution of the United States was completed and signed by a majority of delegates attending the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

In 1908, Lt. Thomas E. Selfridge of the U.S. Army Signal Corps became the first person to die in the crash of a powered aircraft, the Wright Flyer, at Fort Myer, Va., just outside Washington, D.C.

In 1911, Calbraith P. Rodgers set off from Sheepshead Bay, N.Y., aboard a Wright biplane in an attempt to be the first to travel the width of the United States. (The 49-day journey required 69 stops before ending in Pasadena, Calif.)

In 1937, the likeness of President Abraham Lincoln's head was dedicated at Mount Rushmore.

In 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Poland during World War II, more than two weeks after Nazi Germany had launched its assault. In 1947, James V. Forrestal was sworn in as the first U.S. Secretary of Defense.

In 1962, U.S. space officials announced the selection of nine new astronauts, including Neil A. Armstrong, who became the first man to step onto the moon.

In 1971, citing health reasons, Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, 85, retired. (Black, who was succeeded by Lewis F. Powell Jr., died eight days after making his announcement.)

In 1972, the Korean War comedy-drama "M-A-S-H" premiered on CBS.

In 1978, after meeting at Camp David, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat signed a framework for a peace treaty.

In 1986, the Senate confirmed the nomination of William H. Rehnquist to become the 16th chief justice of the United States.

In 1987, the city of Philadelphia, birthplace of the U.S. Constitution, threw a big party to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the historic document.

Ten years ago: After years of denials by his country, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il admitted that North Korean spies had ab-

ducted about a dozen Japanese citizens decades earlier, and that at least four of the Japanese were still alive. NBA star Patrick Ewing announced his retirement.

Five years ago: President George W. Bush nominated former federal judge Michael Mukasey to become attorney general. The Iraqi government revoked the license of Blackwater USA security firm a day after a shooting incident that had claimed the lives of civilians. During a forum at the University of Florida, Andrew Meyer, a student with a history of taping his own practical jokes, was Tasered by campus police and arrested after repeatedly trying to question Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry.

One year ago: A demonstration calling itself Occupy Wall Street began in New York, prompting similar protests around the U.S. and the world. Charles H. Percy, 91, a Chicago businessman who became a U.S. senator and was once widely viewed as a top presidential contender, died in Washington.

Today's Birthdays: Actor David Hedlund is 82. Sen. Charles E. Grassley, R-Iowa, is 79. Retired Supreme Court Justice David H. Souter is 73. Singer LaMonte McLemore (The Fifth Dimension) is 77. Marine Gen. Anthony Zinni (ret.) is 69. Basketball Hall of Fame coach Phil Jackson is 67. Singer Fee Waybill is 62. Actress Cassandra Peterson ("Elvira, Mistress of the Dark") is 61. Comedian Rita Rudner is 59. Muppeteer Kevin Clash is 52. Director-actor Paul Feig is 50. Movie director Baz Luhrmann is 50. Singer BeBe Winans is 50. Actor Kyle Chandler is 47. Director-producer Bryan Singer is 47. Rapper Doug E. Fresh is 46. Actor Malik Yoba is 45. Rock musician Keith Flint (Prodigy) is 43. Actor Matthew Settle is 43. Rapper Vinnie (Naughty By Nature) is 42. Actor Felix Solis is 41. Rock singer Anastacia is 39. Rhythm-and-blues singer Marcus Sanders (Hi-Five) is 39. Actress-singer Nona Gaye is 38. Singer-actor Constantine Maroulis is 37. NASCAR driver Jimmie Johnson is 37. Pop singer Miley Cyrus (Eden's Crush) is 36. Country singer-songwriter Stephen Cochran is 33. Rock musician Chuck Comeau (Simple Plan) is 33. Actor Billy Miller is 33. Country singer Desi Vasdin (3 of Hearts) is 29. Rock musician Jon Walker is 27.

Thought for Today: "Governments exist to protect the rights of minorities. The loved and the rich need no protection — they have many friends and few enemies." — Wendell Phillips, American abolitionist (1811-1884).

FROM THE BIBLE

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Romans 13:1. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

Losing Your Religion

 BY BILL O'REILLY
 Creators Syndicate

On Jan. 8, 1962, President John F. Kennedy wrote a letter celebrating the work of James Cardinal Gibbons, who died in 1921. Kennedy, who rarely discussed his Catholicism, did so while describing the Cardinal: "He nobly expresses the essential traditions of my church in the United States ... the deep sympathy for the plight of the working man and of minorities, the steady concern for the betterment of society and mankind."

Thus, it was somewhat startling to see JFK's daughter, Caroline Kennedy, invoke her father's name and describe herself as a "Catholic woman" while espousing a passionate defense of abortion rights at the Democratic convention. President Kennedy never publicly commented on abortion, and indeed, his brother Teddy was ardently pro-life when he began his political career. Of course, that changed over time as Sen. Kennedy evolved into a liberal lion and enthusiastically entered the pro-choice den.

Caroline Kennedy has to know that the Catholic Church condemns abortion. It is a mortal sin in the eyes of the institution. There is no debate on that. So for Ms. Kennedy to describe herself as a Catholic woman in the context of promoting "reproductive rights" is a direct insult to her religion. Why would she do that? Other Catholic politicians such as Mario Cuomo say they don't personally believe in abortion but respect the legal process that allows it. Not so with Caroline Kennedy. She openly told the world that she is an abortion crusader; she stated belief of her church be damned.



Bill O'REILLY

A Gallup poll says 24 percent of practicing Catholics believe abortion is morally acceptable. At first glance, that's hard to fathom, but not when you analyze the landscape. After Caroline Kennedy's speech, not one American Catholic leader publicly criticized her. There was complete silence from the

Archbishops. Given a huge opportunity to explain why all life should be considered sacred and why Ms. Kennedy is misguided to say the least, the clerics passed. Call it the silence of the lambs.

It was obvious at the Democratic convention that President Obama and the Democratic Party are extremely bullish on "reproductive rights" and are using the issue to promote a fabricated "war on women" by the Republican Party. In response, the GOP has little to offer. It fears being branded "anti-woman."

But theologians don't have to run for office or curry favor with any group. They supposedly have a moral obligation to define their beliefs and stand up for what they consider God's will.

Abortion eliminates life. That's what the procedure does. Human DNA is present upon conception. If the Catholic Church believes that abortion is against what God intended, then it should be just as adamant about stating its case as Caroline Kennedy is about stating hers.

It is not.

Veteran TV news anchor Bill O'Reilly is host of the Fox News show "The O'Reilly Factor" and author of the book "Pinheads and Patriots: Where You Stand in the Age of Obama."

Childish Behavior, Dire Consequences

 BY LEONARD PITTS JR.
 Tribune Media Services

I was not aware of a film insulting to Islam until American embassies were attacked in Libya and Egypt. Thus, Muslim extremists managed, through the expedient of riot and rampage, to bring attention to the very thing they loathe, a thing which, but for their help, would have been little noticed. The irony of that likely goes over their heads like a jet plane.

"Innocence of Muslims" is said to have had a budget of \$5 million. From the look of it, maybe 40 of those dollars made it to the screen — you'd see better production values in a porn video. Better acting and more natural dialogue, too. Of course, it's not the quality of the movie that's causing the problem.

Islam forbids depictions of the Prophet Muhammad. "Innocence" not only depicts him, but also shows him as a philanderer, child molester, killer and feckless fop. The actor who plays him seems to be channeling John Ritter, circa "Three's Company."

So yes, "Innocence of Muslims" is, indeed, an insult to Islam. And to film. And to intelligence.

All that said, the greatest offense here is not this crude attempt at provocation. It is, rather, the mobs of Muslims storming the gates of American embassies in Egypt and Libya. In the former, they pulled down an American flag and replaced it with a black Islamist flag. In the latter, they killed four people, including Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens. At this writing, protests are spreading across the region, with outbreaks in Iran, Iraq, Israel, Morocco and Tunisia, among others.

Not to trivialize a deadly situation, but in considering these would-be defenders of Islam, one is struck above all else by their childishness. I am thinking of a specific scenario familiar to any parent of two children or more:

The kids are in the back seat, and suddenly you hear the dreaded words: "He's touching me!" It is whined at a pitch of such fevered urgency that if you didn't know better, you'd swear one child was killing the other. But no, it's only that child number two has



Leonard PITTS

discovered she can, with little effort, drive child number one into spasms of apoplexy. So she keeps doing it till you hear yourself yelling, "Don't make me turn this car around!"

Yes, the second child has gone out of her way to needlessly provoke her sibling. But you are also irked at the sibling for being so easily provoked, for not understanding that if he simply stopped giving his sister the reaction she craves, she'd stop doing the stupid thing.

It is that dynamic we see play out repeatedly among Muslim extremists. We saw it in 2005 when riots erupted over a cartoon depicting Muhammad. ("He's touching me!") We saw it in 2011 when riots erupted after a Florida "preacher" burned a Quran. ("He's looking at me!") Now we see it in the uproar over this stupid film. ("Don't make me turn this planet around!")

What's next? Riots because some provocateur sculpts a face on a cucumber and calls it Muhammad? Murder because some moron draws a stick figure having sex and says it's Muhammad? There are 7 billion people on this planet and 6 billion of them are not Muslims. Do these geniuses propose to throw a tantrum every time one of those 6 billion goes online to insult Islam? Would you give that many people power and permission to make you crazy?

Children, at least, have the excuse of being children when they fail to understand how an over-the-top reaction only ensures further provocation. The hotbloods of Islamic fundamentalism are old enough to know better. They ought to grow up.

That must be the message they hear from the rest of the world and, in particular, from their co-religionists. Terrorism, intolerance and these repeated outbursts injure their faith more grievously than some obscure movie ever could.

They are angry it disrespects Islam. But they don't seem to respect Islam all that much themselves.

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YOUR LETTERS

Police State

Rex Alberts, Yankton

Recently, it was reported that Native American women are being harassed on the reservations. This is no justification, but white people are being harassed on the highways. The goal is revenue much more than safety.

The following situations involve no alcohol, no citations and no fines — just obvious harassment of white people by a Police State. This is the same as other dictatorships of the world.

In one situation, I was stopped, and the officer said he thought he smelled "an odor of alcohol" in my car.

There never has been alcohol in my car, and I don't drink. He then frisked me and had me blow in a straw. There was no probable cause.

In another situation, an officer said that a call came in from the highway about 20 miles away and said I was swerving and speeding. Neither was true. The officer asked me all about drinking and watched me get out of the car. Apparently, he thought I would fall down.

As I said, there was no alcohol or citations. I do have a long-standing limp.

Perhaps, 90 percent of the officers do not harass. The others smell alcohol everywhere. Even fewer than 10 percent of the people are murderers.

WRITE US

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