

THE PRESS & DAKOTAN

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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Immigrants Could Fill Voids In Neb.

**KEARNEY HUB (Sept. 14):** We know that immigrants are filling many of the manual labor jobs that Americans don't want to fill. We also know that some highly skilled immigrants are filling positions that require advanced knowledge of math, science and engineering.

Those are two good economic reasons for U.S. lawmakers to proceed with immigration reform. Here is another.

New research by a Duke University professor shows that immigrants are raising the value of housing stocks in some U.S. communities. The findings by Professor Jacob Vigdor, based on extensive study of census data, certainly are of interest to urban Americans, where the Great Recession left scores of vacant homes as owners walked away from upside down mortgages. The vacancies eroded the value of whole neighborhoods, invited crime and caused urban decay.

Vigdor's study concludes that an influx of immigrants can resurrect such urban neighborhoods, but could the same effect not be expected in Nebraska, where rural population decline has become a serious concern?

If we believe that immigrants could help reinvigorate rural Nebraska, the key is allowing them a path to citizenship so they can settle down. Until Congress resolves the legality issue, undocumented immigrants will continue to live in the shadows. They'll hesitate to become permanent residents because their illegal status poses the threat of deportation.

That's why allowing a path to citizenship makes sense. Citizenship would aid immigrants, but it also would aid communities by filling vacant homes and giving businesses a more stable workforce.

According to Vigdor, naturalized immigrants are more productive employees. With experience, they win promotions and contribute more to their companies' success. As a result, they out-earn undocumented immigrants by 16 percent.

Think of the implications in rural Nebraska, where reform could open the door for new residents to reverse the population decline and provide employers a stable workforce that reinvigorates main streets as these new residents put down roots. The new home owners would patronize grocery stores, appliance dealerships and purchase other goods and services.

Evidence favoring immigration reform continues to grow, yet too many lawmakers in Washington — including most of Nebraska's delegation — are dragging their feet. Why?

OUR LETTER POLICY

The **PRESS & DAKOTAN** encourages its readers to write letters to the editor, and it asks that a few simple guidelines be followed.

■ Please limit letters to 300 words or less. Letters should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind.

■ In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the **PRESS & DAKOTAN** will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses.

■ Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.

■ Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail to: Letters, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078, drop off at 319 Walnut in Yankton, fax to 665-1721 or email to views@yankton.net.

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press

Today is Monday, Sept. 23, the 266th day of 2013. There are 99 days left in the year.

**Today's Highlight in History:** On Sept. 23, 1952, Sen. Richard M. Nixon, R-Calif., salvaged his vice-presidential nomination by appearing live on television to refute allegations of improper campaign fundraising. (The address became known as the "Checkers" speech because of Nixon's on-air reference to the family pet, a dog named Checkers.)

**On this date:** In 63 B.C., Caesar Augustus, the first Roman emperor, was born.

In 1779, during the Revolutionary War, the American warship Bon Homme Richard, commanded by John Paul Jones, defeated the HMS Serapis in battle.

In 1780, British spy John Andre was captured along with papers revealing Benedict Arnold's plot to surrender West Point to the British.

In 1806, the Lewis and Clark expedition returned to St. Louis more than two years after setting out for the Pacific Northwest.

In 1846, Neptune was identified as a planet by German astronomer Johann Gottfried Galle.

In 1908, an apparent baserunning error by Fred Merkle of the New York Giants cost his team a victory against the Chicago Cubs and left the game tied 1-1. The Cubs won a rematch and with it, the National League pennant.

In 1912, Mack Sennett's first Keystone short subject, a "split-reel" of two comedies both starring Mabel Normand and Ford Sterling ("Cohen Collects a Debt" and "The Water Nymph"), was released. Houston's William Marsh Rice Institute, later renamed Rice University, opened for classes on the 12th anniversary of Rice's death.

In 1949, President Harry S. Truman announced there was evidence the Soviet Union had recently conducted a nuclear test explosion. The test had been carried out on Aug. 29, 1949.

In 1957, nine black students who'd entered Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas were forced to withdraw because of a white mob outside.

In 1962, "The Jetsons," an animated cartoon series about a Space Age family, premiered as the ABC television network's first color program.

In 1973, former Argentine president Juan Peron won a landslide election victory that returned him to power; his wife, Isabel, was elected vice president.

In 1981, the Reagan administration announced plans for what became known as Radio Marti.

In 2001, President George W.

Bush returned the American flag to full staff at Camp David, symbolically ending a period of national mourning for the 9/11 attacks on New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Thousands gathered at New York's Yankee Stadium to offer prayers for the victims of terrorism; Mayor Rudolph Giuliani pledged that "our skyline will rise again." Thirteen coal miners were killed in explosions at the Blue Creek Mine Number 5 in Brookwood, Ala.

**Ten years ago:** Speaking at the United Nations, President George W. Bush rejected calls from France and Germany to hasten the transfer of power in Iraq, insisting the shift to self-government could be "neither hurried nor delayed." A federal appeals court unanimously put California's recall election back on the calendar for October 7.

**Five years ago:** Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad accused what he called "a few building powers" of trying to thwart his country's peaceful nuclear program and declared in a speech before the U.N. General Assembly that "the American empire" was nearing collapse. A 22-year-old gunman opened fire at his trade school in Finland, killing 10 people before fatally shooting himself.

**One year ago:** "Homeland" won the Emmy Award for best drama series, and its stars Claire Danes and Damian Lewis each won leading actor awards. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney told reporters he would spend less time raising money and more time with voters. The Libyan militia suspected in the attack on the U.S. diplomatic compound that killed the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans said it had disbanded on orders of the country's president.

**Today's Birthdays:** Actor Mickey Rooney is 93. Singer Julio Iglesias is 70. Actor Paul Petersen ("The Donna Reed Show") is 68. Actress-singer Mary Kay Place is 66. Rock star Bruce Springsteen is 64. Rock musician Leon Taylor (The Ventures) is 58. Actress Rosalind Rao is 56. Gaffer Larry Mize is 55. Actor Jason Alexander is 54. Actress Elizabeth Pena is 54. Actor Chi McBride is 52. Country musician Don Herron (BR549) is 51. Actor Erik Todd Dellums is 49. Actress LisaRaye is 47. Singer Ani DiFranco is 43. Rock singer Sarah Bettens (K's Choice) is 41. Recording executive Jermaine Dupri is 41. Actor Kip Pardue is 37. Actor Anthony Mackie is 35. Pop singer Erik-Michael Estrada ("Making the Band") is 34. Actress Aubrey Dollar is 33. Tennis player Melanie Oudin is 22.

**Thought for Today:** "The only interesting answers are those which destroy the questions." — Susan Sontag, American author and critic (1933-2004).

FROM THE BIBLE

Owe no one anything, except to love each other. Romans 13:8. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis



Capitol Notebook

SD Public Employees Shielded From Scrutiny

BY BOB MERCER

State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — South Dakota's laws regarding public records are in some ways good and in other ways bad, depending on what a person is trying to learn about the everyday operations within a government or public school district.

The laws, rewritten in 2009, clearly favor public knowledge on financial matters.

That section directs the laws be "liberally construed" on financial records and citizens "shall have the full right to know of and have full access to information on the public finances of the government and the public bodies and entities created to serve them."

But the laws also clearly shield government officials and employees from public scrutiny.

Their correspondence, memoranda, calendars or logs of appointments, working papers, and records of telephone calls made on the job — public or personal — aren't considered public records.

The consequence is, in most instances, citizens can't know what public employees are doing except at a public meeting.

Further, the open-records laws don't apply to anyone in the judicial branch — and only to the Legislature when legislators agree.

Recently the correspondence exemption for officials and employees snagged this reporter.

At a meeting held months ago, a public body directed that two letters be sent to another organization. The discussions and the vote were shown in the meeting minutes.

The department in custody of the records provided one of the letters that I requested. But there wasn't any mention of the second letter.

Miss America And The Idiots

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.

Tribune Content Agency

A couple months ago, I got an email from Supreet.

Supreet is in the 11th grade. He shops at Wal-Mart and plays basketball. His father came to this country from India and both are Sikhs, followers of a centuries-old faith founded in the Punjab region. Supreet wanted to tell me what it is like being a Sikh in America.

He wrote about how, after 9/11, his father became "perhaps the most hated man in our small town." He wrote about how his dad had to stop wearing the turban Sikh men use to cover their "kesh," the hair their faith forbids them to cut. He wrote about bullying and depression suffered by young Sikhs. He wrote about black boys who taunted him as "Osama's son." He wrote about Wade Michael Page, who in 2012, shot 10 people, killing six, at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin, likely thinking it was a mosque. He wrote about how President Obama canceled a visit to a Sikh holy site in 2010, which some people thought was because male visitors are required to cover their heads and Obama didn't want anyone calling him a Muslim.

"But Sikhs are NOT Muslims," wrote Supreet. "Why do we keep getting labeled as Muslims?" It is a plaintive question with which the new Miss America would doubtless sympathize. Nina Davuluri of New York state won the crown last week, becoming the first Indian American to do so. Her triumph was marred by an eruption of — pardon the tautology — ignorant bigotry on social media.

"Audrey Graham" tweeted, "Miss America is a terrorist. Whatever. It's fine."

"Luke Brasili" tweeted, "9/11 was four days ago and she gets miss America?"

"De La Rutherford" tweeted, "Congratulations, Al-Qaeda. Our Miss America is one of you."

And you are almost — almost — less appalled by the bigotry than by the slack-jawed, knuckle-dragging, dull-eyed ignorance of people so stupefyingly uninformed that they can't even hate straight. Miss America's parents are Hindu.

YOUR LETTERS

A Helpful Project

Pauline Aklad, Yankton

President, GFWC Yankton

Yankton's General Federated Women's Club would like to thank Chad Bent at Walmart for the donations toward bedding and Randy Kaiser and Tiffany Schliuing of Sherwin Williams for the donation of the paint for our recent homeless shelter project.

I also want to thank Mary Pietila, Maysel Goltz and Judi & Sonny Olson for their help in painting, cleaning, searching for the bedding and Sonny for building new cabinet doors for the cupboards in the basement.

I followed up, asking if two letters were indeed sent. Yes, an official replied, but they weren't releasing the second letter.

Initially they cited "personnel" as the reason for the denial. I asked for the specific exemption. The reason then became the correspondence exemption.

State law, thanks to former Attorney General Larry Long, contains a specific process for formally seeking a record.

I filed a formal request and cited two reasons the letter must be a public record. The two letters were transmittals of a public body's official decision. The letters also dealt in some ways with financial matters.

If my formal request was denied, I was prepared to use the appeal process in state law, where an administrative hearing officer reviews the matter and gives a decision. If necessary, I was prepared to appeal an adverse decision to circuit court, the next step under state law.

The officials in custody of the letters decided to relinquish a copy of the second letter. They also mentioned in the course of the discussion they received a response to that letter from the other organization. I asked for and received a copy of the response letter.

The officials made clear they hoped I wouldn't write a story. One of the officials declined to answer a question until he knew what I planned to do. I didn't answer either way and moved on to another topic.

The letters aren't the main point of what I am researching. I don't know yet how the letters fit. But they are telling about attitude and relationship.

Citizens generally should have the right to know what official letters say.



Leonard PITTS

dus. Hindus are not Muslims, either. Not that hating them would be acceptable even if they were. And not that the distinction will matter to the folks quoted above. All dark-skinned people with exotic names or unfamiliar customs are Muslim terrorists to that bunch of nuclear physicists.

"There was more. "Jessica Ayres" offered this self-negating bon mot when Davuluri won: "I swear I'm not racist but this is America." Then there was "Jonah Carlin," who tweeted images of blond, blue-eyed Miss Kansas, Theresa Vail, dubbing her "a real Miss America."

And so it goes. Some of us are not beauty pageant fans. Indeed, some of us find them archaic outposts of retrograde sexism. But surely all of us can agree that if we are going to have such pageants, they should not be stained by xenophobic prejudice.

Nina Davuluri deserves better. So does Supreet. Their families, after all, chose this country. Consider what that means: To give up everything you have always known and of all the other options available, decide that this is where you want to be. Presumably, one factor in that choice was America's promise: here you are equal, here you are free, here you may rise to whatever height aspiration and hard work will take you.

So the treatment they have received is not just ugly, but embarrassing and not just embarrassing but promise-breaking. Jonah Carlin and others like him need to read the writing on the demographic wall. What was exotic and unfamiliar yesterday is shopping at Wal-Mart and shooting hoops today. Change is coming; that fact is non-negotiable. But our success or lack thereof in incorporating that change will determine what America is 50 years from now.

Step one: Decide if we are serious in what we claim ourselves to be. In other words, we can either keep America's promise or else stop making it.

Leonard Pitts is a columnist for The Miami Herald, 1 Herald Plaza, Miami, Fla., 33132. Readers may contact him via e-mail at lpitts@miami-herald.com.

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