

THE PRESS & DAKOTAN

THE DAKOTAS' OLDEST NEWSPAPER | FOUNDED 1861

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Published Daily Monday-Saturday

Periodicals postage paid at Yankton, South Dakota, under the act of March 3, 1979.

Weekly Dakotian established June 6, 1861. Yankton Daily Press and Dakotian established April 26, 1875.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Yankton Daily Press & Dakotian, 319 Walnut, Yankton, SD 57078.

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OPINION | OUR VIEW

It's Apocalypse As Usual In Washington

Another government shutdown looms over our heads like a late-summer storm cloud.

So what else is new?

Such a casual dismissal, based on weary experience, is about as damning a comment as we can muster on the current state of political deadlock in Washington.

The next shutdown threat — the next manufactured budgetary apocalypse — is set for Oct. 1; this time it's a game of chicken tied in part to the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare (which starts kicking in on that Oct. 1 date).

It's also about two political forces that are so bitterly entrenched and so unbendingly opposite of one another on practically every front, that you get the feeling anytime a member of one side says hello to the other, it's a victory for bipartisanship.

So, in broad brushstrokes, it's same old bullheadedness and calculated animosity grabbing the stage again.

What's also not new is the fact that millions of people will likely get hurt if the government grounds to a halt. That includes government employees and entire government agencies that would be mothballed until some minute measure of sense returns to Capitol Hill.

(Ironically, if the government does shut down, the provisions of Obamacare, which kick in on Oct. 1, will probably function just fine, according to an analyst cited on the Roll Call website.)

Not only are the politicians on the right and left divided, but also the Republican Party is bitterly split on the best way to move forward. Some want to take the nation hostage, in effect; others think the would-be hostage-takers are on a mission of self-destruction.

Which leaves us, one week out, watching this madness spin out of control again along the Potomac.

The most disconcerting thing is, given the repercussions that may be involved, too many of us don't care that much anymore. We've been bludgeoned into numbness by heated partisan politics that shows no real allegiance to everyday people and all the devotion in the world to party-line ideologies.

No wonder many people are simply ignoring what's going on.

If the government does shut down, it is a terrible commentary on our leadership in Washington.

If we don't care because we've seen all this too much before, it simply doubles down on the disgust and shame.

And Washington really should be ashamed of itself right now.

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THE VIEWS PAGE

■ The **PRESS & DAKOTAN** Views page provides a forum for open discussion of issues and interests affecting our readers. Initialed editorials represent the opinion of the writer, but not necessarily that of the **PRESS & DAKOTAN**. Bylined columns represent the view of the author. We welcome letters to the editor on current topics. Questions regarding the Views page should be directed to Kelly Hertz at views@yankton.net.

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, Sept. 25, the 268th day of 2013. There are 97 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Sept. 25, 1789, the first United States Congress adopted 12 amendments to the Constitution and sent them to the states for ratification. Ten of the amendments became the Bill of Rights.

On this date: In 1513, Spanish explorer Vasco Nunez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama and sighted the Pacific Ocean.

In 1690, one of the earliest American newspapers, *Publick Occurrences*, published its first — and last — edition in Boston.

In 1775, American Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allen was captured by the British as he led an attack on Montreal. Allen was released by the British in 1778.

In 1904, a New York City police officer ordered a female automobile passenger on Fifth Avenue to stop smoking a cigarette. A male companion was arrested and later fined \$2 for "abusing" the officer.

In 1911, ground was broken for Boston's Fenway Park.

In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson collapsed after a speech in Pueblo, Colo., during a national speaking tour in support of the Treaty of Versailles.

In 1932, the Spanish region of Catalonia received a Charter of Autonomy. However, the charter was revoked by Francisco Franco at the end of the Spanish Civil War.

In 1957, nine black students who'd been forced to withdraw from Central High School in Little Rock, Ark., because of unruly white crowds were escorted to class by members of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division.

In 1962, Sonny Liston knocked out Floyd Patterson in Round 1 to win the world heavyweight title at Comiskey Park in Chicago. "The Longest Day," 20th Century Fox's epic recreation of the D-Day invasion, based on the book by Cornelius Ryan, had its world premiere in France.

In 1978, 144 people were killed when a Pacific Southwest Airlines Boeing 727 and a private plane collided over San Diego.

In 1981, Sandra Day O'Connor was sworn in as the first female justice on the Supreme Court.

In 1992, the Mars Observer blasted off on a \$980 million mission to the Red Planet. The probe disappeared just before entering Martian orbit in August 1993. A judge in Orlando, Fla., ruled in favor of Gregory Kingsley, a 12-year-old seeking to "divorce" his biological parents.

In 2001, Saudi Arabia formally severed relations with Afghanistan's hard-line Taliban government. Former Chicago Bulls player Michael Jordan, who'd left professional basketball after winning a half-dozen championship rings, announced he was returning to the game with the Washington Wizards.

Ten years ago: France reported a staggering death toll of 14,802 from the summer heat wave. An Islamic court in Nigeria overturned the conviction of an illiterate mother sentenced to be stoned to death for having sex out of wedlock. Aquila al-Hashimi of

the Iraqi Governing Council died five days after being shot by assailants. Fifteen people died in a nursing home fire in Nashville, Tenn. Author, journalist and editor George Plimpton died in New York at age 76. Nobel-winning economist Franco Modigliani died in Cambridge, Mass., at age 85.

Five years ago: Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama sat down with President George W. Bush at the White House to discuss a multibillion-dollar Wall Street bailout plan, but the session, which also included top congressional leaders, devolved into what the McCain campaign described afterward as a "contentious shouting match." Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin defended her remark that the close proximity of Russia to her home state of Alaska gave her foreign policy experience, explaining in a CBS interview that "we have trade missions back and forth." Anti-apartheid activist Kgalema Motlanthe became the third president of South Africa since the end of white rule. After a 43-year wait, Paul McCartney performed his first concert in Israel, saying he was on a mission of peace for Israel and the Palestinians.

One year ago: President Barack Obama, speaking to the U.N. General Assembly, pledged U.S. support for Syrians trying to oust President Bashar Assad, calling him "a dictator who massacres his own people." U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, "We must stop the violence and flows of arms to both sides." Mitt Romney joined running mate Paul Ryan for two days of campaigning in Ohio. A survey of consumer confidence reached its highest level since February on expectations that hiring would soon pick up. The NFL met with locked-out referees and admitted that a blown call the previous night had cost the Green Bay Packers a game against the Seattle Seahawks. Singer and TV host Andy Williams died at his Branson, Mo., home at the age of 84.

Today's Birthdays: Broadcast journalist Barbara Walters is 84. Folk singer Ian Tyson is 80. Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates is 70. Actor Josh Taylor is 70. Actor-producer Michael Douglas is 69. Model Cheryl Tiegs is 66. Actress Mimi Kennedy is 64. Actor-director Anson Williams is 64. Actor Mark Hamill is 62. Basketball Hall of Famer Bob McDoo is 62. Polka bandleader Jimmy Sturr is 62. Actor Colin Fries is 61. Actor Michael Madsen is 55. Actress Heather Locklear is 52. Actress Aida Turturro is 51. Actor Tate Donovan is 50. TV personality Keely Shaye Smith is 50. Basketball Hall of Famer Scottie Pippen is 48. Actor Jason Fleming is 47. Actor Will Smith is 45. Actor Hal Sparks is 44. Actress Catherine Zeta-Jones is 44. Rock musician Mike Luce (Drowning Pool) is 42. Actress Bridgette Wilson-Sampras is 40. Actress Clea DuVall is 36. Actor Robbie Jones is 36. Actor Chris Owen is 33. Rapper T.I. is 33. Actor Van Hansis is 32. Actor Lee Norris is 32. Singer Diana Ortiz (Dream) is 28. Actress Emmy Clarke ("Monk") is 22.

Thought for Today: "The richer your friends, the more they will cost you." — Elisabeth Marbury, American writer (1856-1933).

FROM THE BIBLE

I die every day! 1 Corinthians 15:31. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis



The 'Free Market' Myth

BY ROBERT B. REICH

Tribune Content Agency

One of the most deceptive ideas continuously sounded by the right (and its fathomless think tanks and media outlets) is that the "free market" is natural and inevitable, existing outside and beyond government.

So whatever inequality or insecurity it generates is beyond our control. And whatever ways we might seek to reduce inequality or insecurity — to make the economy work for us — are unwarranted constraints on the market's freedom and will inevitably go wrong.

By this view, if some people aren't paid enough to live on, the market has determined they aren't worth enough. If others rake in billions, they must be worth it. If millions of Americans remain unemployed or their paychecks are shrinking or they work two or three part-time jobs with no idea what they'll earn next month or next week, that's too bad; it's just the outcome of the market.

According to this logic, government shouldn't intrude through minimum wages, high taxes on top earners, public spending to get people back to work, regulations on business, or anything else, because the "free market" knows best.

In reality, the "free market" is a bunch of rules about (1) what can be owned and traded (the genome? slaves? nuclear materials? babies? votes?); (2) on what terms (equal access to the Internet? the right to organize unions? corporate monopolies? the length of patent protections?); (3) under what conditions (poisonous drugs? unsafe foods? deceptive Ponzi schemes? uninsured derivatives? dangerous workplaces?); (4) what's private and what's public (police? roads? clean air and water? health care? good schools? parks and playgrounds?); (5) how to pay for what (taxes? user fees? individual pricing?). And so on.

These rules don't exist in nature; they are human creations. Governments don't "intrude" on free markets; governments organize and maintain them. Markets aren't "free" of rules; the rules define them. Without such rules, we're back to social Darwinism, where only the tough-



Robert

REICH

est and biggest survive.

The interesting question is what the rules should aim to achieve. They can be designed to maximize efficiency (given the current distribution of resources), or growth (depending on what

we're willing to sacrifice to obtain that growth), or fairness (depending on our ideas about a decent society). Or some combination of all three — which aren't necessarily in competition with one another. Evidence suggests, for example, that if prosperity were more widely shared, we'd have faster growth.

The rules might even be designed to entrench and enhance the wealth of a few at the top, and keep almost everyone else comparatively poor and economically insecure.

Which brings us to the central political question: Who should decide on the rules and their major purpose? If our democracy were working as it

should, presumably our elected representatives, agency heads and courts would be making the rules roughly according to what most of us want the rules to be. The economy would be working for us.

Instead, the rules are now made mostly by those with the power and resources to buy the politicians, regulatory heads and even the courts (and the lawyers who appear before them). As income and wealth have concentrated at the top, so has political clout. And the most important clout is determining the rules of the game.

Not incidentally, these are the same people who want you and most others to believe in the fiction of an immutable "free market."

As I emphasize in "Inequality for All" — a new film out this week in which I explain the savage inequalities and insecurities now undermining our economy and democracy — we can make the economy work for us rather than for only a few at the top. But in order to change the rules, we must exert the power that is supposed to be ours.

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 Sept. 27. He blogs at www.robertreich.org.

Leonard Pitts Jr.

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.

Tribune Content Agency

A few words on the new pope.

Since ascending to the papacy in March, the former Jorge Mario Bergoglio has managed to surprise and impress the religious and irreligious alike by living a brand of faith seldom seen on the public stage. Pope Francis insists on carrying his own bags, living in a simple apartment and cooking his own supper. He has largely shunned the papal Mercedes-Benz in favor of a 5-year-old Ford Focus. One of the earliest acts of his papacy was to wash and kiss the feet of a dozen young prisoners, two of them girls, at least one of them a Muslim.

But the pontiff's appeal has not been solely stylistic. It has also been a matter of substance. This is, after all, the pope who famously asked, "Who am I to judge?" gay people. And who criticized Catholics as narrowly "obsessed" with abortion, same-sex marriage and contraception. And who called his church to be "for the poor." And who said God loves atheists, too.

Tellingly, the pope has not — yet — sought to change any bedrock teaching of Catholicism. Still, his vision of a more compassionate and inclusive church has won him rave reviews from across the cultural spectrum. Thomas Groome, a theology professor at Boston University, called him "a breath of fresh air." Columnist Michael Gerson described him approvingly as a "disruptive force." Jon Stewart of "The Daily Show" said, "I love this guy!" Chris Rock tweeted that "the new pope might be the greatest man alive."

It is a shower of unaccustomed approbation that should leave Christians, well ... a little embarrassed.

They — we — should ask what it tells us that a pope models humility, inclusion, unpretentiousness, concern for the poor and nonjudgmental, small "c" catholic love — and people are surprised. Indeed, it generates headlines around the world.

What it should tell us is that people are not used to seeing those virtues from people of faith. Their praise, then, amounts to a stark indictment.

YOUR LETTERS

Get A Plan

Toni Johnson, Avon

I stayed for my children, no matter how bad the abuse became. Then my husband left me for dead.

October is National Domestic Abuse Awareness Month. When I finally left, the children were 1, 3 and 5 years old. Although the abuse also affected the younger two children, the 5-

year-old remembered the sounds of the kicks, punches, slaps and my screams. The 5-year-old grew up and became a father. He nearly beat my grandson to death.

I thought back on how I stayed for the children. It nearly cost me my life and, years later, the life of my grandson.

Get a plan and get out for yourself and for the children.

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