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Yankton Media, Inc., 319 Walnut St., Yankton, SD 57078

CONTACT US
PHONE:
(605) 665-7811
(800) 743-2968
NEWS FAX:
(605) 665-1721
ADVERTISING FAX:
(605) 665-0288
WEBSITE:
www.yankton.net

SUBSCRIPTIONS/ CIRCULATION
Extension 104
jim.gevens@yankton.net
CLASSIFIED ADS
Extension 116
tera.schmidt@yankton.net
NEWS DEPT.
Extension 114
news@yankton.net
SPORTS DEPT.
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NEW MEDIA:
Extension 136
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COMPOSING DEPT.
Extension 129
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OPINION

School Activities: A Smart Investment

The Yankton School District did something rather interesting and, as it turned out, pretty smart recently when it conducted a survey of students in regards to the activities in which they are involved.

The results provide telling insight into not only how many students are involved in activities — the answer is, a lot — but also how their interests in various activities may progress as they move through the system and get exposed to new opportunities.

This is helpful information to have when you consider how crucial involvement in school activities is, generally, to student performance in the classroom.

The Yankton School District may well pursue another property tax opt-out soon, and one of the tactics often used by opponents of such measures (both here and elsewhere) is to lob criticism at the money the district spends on activities ranging from athletic events to educate students, they conclude that items such as football, orchestra or debate are superfluous and a waste of taxpayer dollars.

But this argument ignores the mechanics of the human mind and of social connectivity. Studies have long shown that students involved in activities tend to perform better in the classroom, and it puts them in a better position to pursue a post-high school education. For example, in each of the nearly 40 activities available at Yankton High School, the cumulative grade point average is well above 3.0 on a 4-point scale. That trend has been in place for years, and honestly, it's no accident.

Also, being in an activity allows students to become more involved in school life, which molds them socially.

That makes school activities a smart investment. Granted, these activities shouldn't be lavished with cash that really needs to be used elsewhere, but activities do provide a revitalizing mental stimulus and a focus that students need to succeed in the classroom and in life.

That's why the activities survey recently conducted by the district, which examined the habits of preferences of students in grades 3-12, was a wise undertaking. It gives administrators some insights into how this multi-headed domain called "activities" really works.

And it may be even more important now than ever before. With the rise in recent years of personal technology, it has become ironically easy for people, including kids, to shut themselves off from social interactions. It's ironic because, with devices such as smartphones, it's far easier now to get and stay connected with other people than ever before — and yet, in the process, some of us close ourselves off from others by shutting ourselves into a world that's all about interaction but seems to thrive on isolation.

This is another area where school activities are important. Again, they promote involvement, teamwork, sharing and face-to-face interaction — or, as you might quaintly think of it, "people skills."

While the district's survey does serve its original mission — why the participation numbers for girls basketball were low — it winds up creating a better understanding of how this crucial process of school activity involvement evolves with age and opportunity. And that could be a valuable tool in making this school district an even better place to learn and grow.

kmh

ABOUT THIS PAGE

The View 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 on current topics. Questions regarding the Views page should be directed to Kelly Hertz at kelly.hertz@yankton.net/.

IN HISTORY

By The Associated Press
Today is Wednesday, September 16, the 259th day of 2015. There are 106 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History: On September 16, 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Selective Training and Service Act. Samuel T. Rayburn of Texas was elected Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

On this date: In 1498, Tomas de Torquemada, notorious for his role in the Spanish Inquisition, died in Avila, Spain. In 1810, Mexicans were inspired to begin their successful revolt against Spanish rule by Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and his "Grito de Dolores (Cry of Dolores)."

In 1893, more than 100,000 settlers swarmed onto a section of land in Oklahoma known as the "Cherokee Strip."

In 1908, General Motors was founded in Flint, Michigan, by William C. Durant.

In 1919, the American Legion received a national charter from Congress.

In 1925, the Irving Berlin song "Always" (written for his future wife, Ellin Mackay) was published.

In 1953, "The Robe," the first movie presented in the widescreen process CinemaScope, had its world premiere at the Roxby Theater in New York.

In 1965, "The Dean Martin Show" premiered on NBC-TV.

In 1974, President Gerald R. Ford announced a conditional amnesty program for Vietnam war deserters and draft-evaders.

In 1982, the massacre of between 1,200 and 1,400 Palestinian men, women and children at the hands of Israeli-allied Christian Phalange militiamen began in west Beirut's Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

In 1994, a federal jury in Anchorage, Alaska, ordered Exxon Corp. to pay \$5 billion in punitive damages for the 1989 Exxon Valdez (val-DEEZ) oil spill (the U.S. Supreme Court later reduced that amount to \$507.5 million). Two astronauts from the space shuttle Discovery went on the first untethered spacewalk in ten years.

In 2007, O.J. Simpson was arrested in the alleged armed robbery of sports memorabilia collectors in Las Vegas. (Simpson was later convicted of kidnapping and armed robbery and sentenced to nine to 33 years in prison.)

Ten years ago: President George W. Bush ruled out raising taxes to pay the massive costs of Gulf Coast reconstruction in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, saying other government spending had to be cut to pay for the recovery effort. Gordon Gould, a pioneer in laser technology, died in New York City at age 85.

Five years ago: Pope Benedict XVI began a controversial state visit to Britain, acknowledging the Catholic Church had failed to act decisively or quickly enough to deal with priests who raped and molested children. The Seattle Storm completed

their undefeated march through the post-season, beating the Atlanta Dream 87-84 for a three-game sweep in the WNBA finals. John "Jack" Goeken, founder of telecommunications giant MCI and father of air-to-ground telephone communications, died in Joliet, Illinois, at age 80.

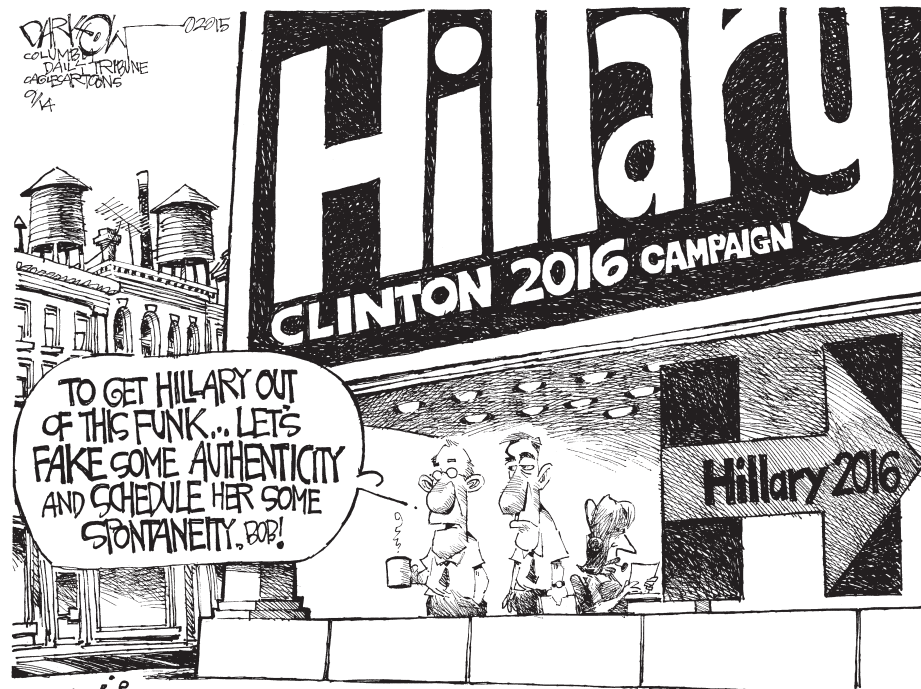
One year ago: President Barack Obama declared that the Ebola epidemic in West Africa could threaten security around the world and ordered 3,000 U.S. troops to the region in emergency aid from angry fans and concerned sponsors, the Minnesota Vikings reversed course and placed star running back Adrian Peterson on the exempt-commissioner's permission list while he addressed a felony charge of child abuse in Texas. (The Vikings had initially decided that Peterson could play with the team while the legal process played out; Peterson later pleaded no contest to misdemeanor reckless assault for physically disciplining his 4-year-old son with a wooden switch.)

Today's Birthdays: Actress Janis Paige is 93. Actor George Chakiris is 83. Bluesman Billy Boy Arnold is 80. Movie director Jim McBride is 74. Actress Linda Miller is 73. Rhythm-and-blues singer Betty Kelley (Martha & the Vandellas) is 71. Musician Kenney Jones (Small Faces; Faces; The Who) is 67. Actress Susan Rulitan is 67. Rock musician Ron Blair (Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers; Mudcrutch) is 67. Actor Ed Begley Jr. is 66. Country singer David Bellamy (The Bellamy Brothers) is 65. Country singer-songwriter Phil Lee is 64. Actor-comedian Lenny Clarke is 62. Actor Kurt Fuller is 62. Jazz musician Earl Klugh is 62. Actor Christopher Rich is 62. Singer Frank Reed (The Chi-Lites) is 61. TV personality Mark McEwen is 61. Baseball Hall of Famer Robin Yount is 60. Actor Mickey Rourke is 59. Magician David Copperfield is 59. Country singer-songwriter Terry McBride is 57. Actress Jennifer Tilly is 57. Retired MLB All-Star pitcher Orel Hershiser is 57. Retired MLB All-Star Tim Lincecum is 56. Actress Jayne Brook is 55. Singer Richard Marx is 52. Comedian Molly Shannon is 51. Singer Marc Anthony is 47. Comedian-actress Amy Poehler is 44. Country singer Matt Stillwell is 40. Singer Musiq (MYOO'-sikh) is 38. Actor Michael Mosley is 37. Rapper Flo Rida is 36. Actress Alexis Bledel is 34. Actress Sabrina Bryan is 31. Actress Madeline Zima is 30. Actor Ian Harding is 29. Actress Kyla Pratt is 29. Actor Daren Kagasoff is 28. Rock singer Teddy Geiger is 27. Actress-dancer Bailey Buntain is 26. Rock singer-musician Nick Jonas (The Jonas Brothers) is 23. Actress Elena Kampouris (TV: "American Odyssey") is 18.

Thought for Today: "Some problems are so complex that you have to be highly intelligent and well informed just to be undecided about them." — Laurence J. Peter, Canadian writer (born this date in 1919, died 1990).

FROM THE BIBLE

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Psalm 95:1. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.



Robert B. Reich

College Rankings Miss The Mark

BY ROBERT B. REICH
Tribune Content Agency

After heavy lobbying from some of the nation's most elite institutions of higher education, the president has just abandoned his effort to rank the nation's 7,000 colleges and universities.

So, with college application season almost upon us, where should aspiring college students and their parents look for advice?

In my view, not *U.S. News and World Report's* annual college guide (out last week). It's analogous to a restaurant guide that gives top ratings to the most expensive establishments that are backed and frequented by the wealthiest gourmands — and much lower rankings to restaurants with the best food at lower prices that attract the widest range of diners.

Without fail, *U.S. News* puts at the top of its list America's most exclusive and expensive private universities that admit low numbers and small percentages of students from poor families.

These elite institutions also train a disproportionately large share of the nation's investment bankers, corporate chieftains, corporate lawyers and management consultants.

For example, around 70 percent of Harvard's senior class routinely submits resumes to Wall Street and corporate consulting firms, according to the *Washington Monthly*. Close to 36 percent of Princeton's 2010 graduating class went into finance, down from 46 percent before the financial crisis, according to the *New York Times*.

And so it goes, through the Ivy League and other elite private institutions.

Meanwhile, *U.S. News* relegates to lower rankings public universities that admit most of the young Americans from poor families who attend college, and which graduate far larger percentages of teachers, social workers, legal aid attorneys, community organizers and public servants than do the private elite colleges.

U.S. News claims its rankings are neutral. Baloney.

They're based on such "neutral" criteria as how selective a college is in its admissions, how much its alumni donate, how much money and other resources its faculty receive, and how much it spends per student.

Colleges especially favored by America's wealthy are bound to excel on these criteria. The elite pour money into them because these institutions have educated them and, they hope, will educate their offspring.

A family name engraved in marble on such a campus confers unparalleled prestige.

And because these institutions have educated such a high proportion of America's wealthy elite, that elite looks with particular favor on graduates of these institutions in making hiring decisions.

Which helps explain their high and increasing selectivity. As the income and wealth of America's elite has soared over recent decades, the financial benefits of being anointed as a graduate of such an institution have soared in tandem.

The *U.S. News* rankings perpetuate the

myth that these elite institutions offer the best education — as if the economic diversity of a student body and the values and career choices of its undergraduates were irrelevant to receiving a high-quality education. And as if educational excellence could be measured by the size of the wallets supporting it.

Public universities are at an inherent disadvantage on these criteria because they rely on state funding instead of wealthy alumni. They also admit large numbers of students, which often means a lower expenditure per student.

And because public universities have a special responsibility to be accessible to students from every economic class, they take more chances on a broader range of promising students, including many who are the first in their families to attend college.

Public universities are the major vehicles of upward mobility in America. They educate 73 percent of all college students. The Ivy League educates just 0.4 percent.

And the best public universities provide a higher-quality education, in my view, than many of the private elites.

Full disclosure: I was educated in private elite universities — Dartmouth and Yale. And I taught for many years at Harvard. These venerable institutions rate at or near the top of the *U.S. News* rankings.

For the past decade, though, I've been teaching at the University of California at Berkeley.

One thing I've discovered: My Berkeley students are every bit as bright as the students I met or taught in the Ivies.

Another thing: More Pell-grant eligible students (a proxy for students from low-income families) attend Berkeley than attend all of the Ivy League schools combined.

And my Berkeley students are more involved in, and more of them are aiming for careers in, public service than any group of students I've ever had the privilege of teaching. (Each year, around 10,000 Berkeley undergraduates engage in off-campus public-service projects and programs.)

In an era when income and wealth are more concentrated at the top than at any other time in living memory — much of it in the hands of Wall Street bankers, corporate executives and their retainers — *U.S. News* has become a major enabler of American inequality.

We need another guide for ranking colleges — one that doesn't look at the fatness of alumni wallets or the amount spent on each student, but does take account of economic diversity and dedication to public service.

Fortunately, there is one. It's a relatively new one, provided by the *Washington Monthly*. My advice: Use it.

Robert Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley and Senior Fellow at the Blum Center for Developing Economies. His new book, "Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few," is out Sept. 29.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Heroes On A Train

Fernande Bitsos, Yankton
The French weekend newspaper *AUJOURD'UI* (Today In France) arrived from my sister in France the other day. It described the brave action of three American military men on a European vacation and an Englishman aboard that train: Spencer Stone, Anthony Sadler, Alek Skarlatos and the Brit Chris Norman. Those four alert passengers were able to tackle and subdue the Moroccan Ayoub el-Khazzani, despite Store's knife wounds on his left arm. I would call them "supermen" heroes for the passengers of the Thalys high-speed train.

However, there is another "hero" that I do not recall being mentioned on our newspapers. His name is Mark Moogalian, 51 years old, a French/American (originally from Virginia). This English Professor at the prestigious Paris Sorbonne University was one of the two first passengers to intervene. While the aggressor had hold of a Kalachnikov and the second French passenger tried to grab it, the professor managed to get hold of it but, in the struggle, the "terrorist" took hold of his hand-gun and shot the professor in the back. The bullet entered his lower back and came out through his shoulder clavicle. That is when the three Americans and the Englishman succeeded in overpowering the terrorist. The

To Our Readers

With a referendum coming up on Sept. 29 regarding the proposed road and bridge levy in Yankton County, the PRESS & DAKOTAN has decided that it will no longer run letters pertaining to the issue free of charge. Any letters concerning the issue will be referred to advertising. This applies only to letters regarding Yankton's County's Sept. 29 special election. Thank you.

train ticket controller was able to contact the police, another employee of that wagon was able to quickly smuggle a few passengers to a safe locked place while the Americans were taking down the terrorist.

The American professor was driven to a hospital in Lille to Dr. Patrick Goldstein, emergency director. Professor Moogalian had three broken ribs and vital organs were touched. If the bullet had reached his carotid, as believed by our Americans heroes, this would have been more complicated said the doctor.

I am proud of our American heroes, our "Fifth" wounded American hero and ditto, the British one. I will write in French that 'L' UNION FAIT LA FORCE' (Union Creates Force)!