

# You're welcome, Mr. Neuharth

There's a task that people in the newspaper business may dread when death knocks on the doorstep of someone near and dear.

They must write a final summary of the dearly departed's life. I have found it can be a heart-wrenching experience, especially since one of the perks of this job is to become well acquainted with the newsmakers of the day.

Upon learning that Al Neuharth passed away on April 19, I began rummaging through my files and collecting photos of his many visits to Vermillion over the years. It was an enlightening rather than a maudlin experience.

In the fleeting time I could devote to attacking my rather haphazard filing system, I gathered photos of Neuharth-centered events I had taken in Vermillion going back to 2004 or so.

In the photos of each progressive year, Mr. Neuharth hardly changes a bit. And in each image, he's rubbing shoulders with someone noteworthy. Don Hewitt. George McGovern. Bob Schieffer. Garrison Keillor. Katie Couric. Marilyn Hagerty, the famed Olive Garden critic.

Each image sparks to life a unique memory, an experience I knew I wouldn't have had if Mr. Neuharth, after achieving glorious success as a newspaperman, never thought it important to return to South Dakota.

During his visits to Vermillion each fall, you could tell he really loved the "sacred soil" of our state, the University of South Dakota, and its young people.

He liked to stand out – no one had a wardrobe like Mr. Neuharth's. He undoubtedly lived life with a bit of swagger – how many people do you know who commission a large bronze bust of themselves?

One could immediately sense, however, that Mr. Neuharth was a pure South Dakotan. He often would say that coming to South Dakota from the East Coast was "like a breath of fresh air."

He also knew there were fellow Dakotans who needed his help, especially USD students and young residents of our Native American reservations who had a yearning to be storytellers in print or broadcast media if someone would give them just a bit of help.

Mr. Neuharth made that a mission in the latter years of his life. The Freedom Forum that he helped create also sponsored journalism workshops for high school-aged Native American students at Crazy Horse.

It helped organize the annual American Indian Journalism Institute held each summer on the USD campus to give those

students an opportunity to experience many of the things he did during his journalism career.

It made the Neuharth Scholarship for local communication students on the Vermillion campus a reality.

He changed countless lives. Some people may immediately think, early in their

reading of his obituary, that he was fortunate to live a long, prosperous life. Well, that's partly correct. The world was blessed by Mr. Neuharth's influence in

the news industry and journalism education. Any of us who had the chance to meet him, even if for only once or twice a year, and to be influenced by him, have been particularly rewarded.

One memory of the legendary journalist that easily comes to my mind – no photograph is required to bring it to life – is of the very first time I met him. Upon learning that I was editor of the Plain Talk, Mr. Neuharth noted that he remembered reading the paper while a student at USD. Evidently, the paper's name had a lasting influence, as he explained that he got the idea to call his weekly column in *USA Today* "Plain Talk" because he simply liked what the name of Vermillion's weekly community newspaper represents.

"When you see something in a newspaper that you like – a page design, a potential column header, something that will really work for you and your readers – you should borrow it," Mr. Neuharth told me.

It's a piece of advice I'll never forget.

And so, following the lead of this newsman, self-described S.O.B., journalistic pioneer and full-hearted South Dakotan, I'm going "borrow" something of Mr. Neuharth's.

In his final "Plain Talk" column, published in the April 22 *USA Today*, he writes, in part:

"As a journalist, I had a wonderful window on the world. Sharing with you what I saw, and liked or didn't like, has been an awesome opportunity and responsibility.

Now the time has come to say goodbye. So this is my eulogy to you.

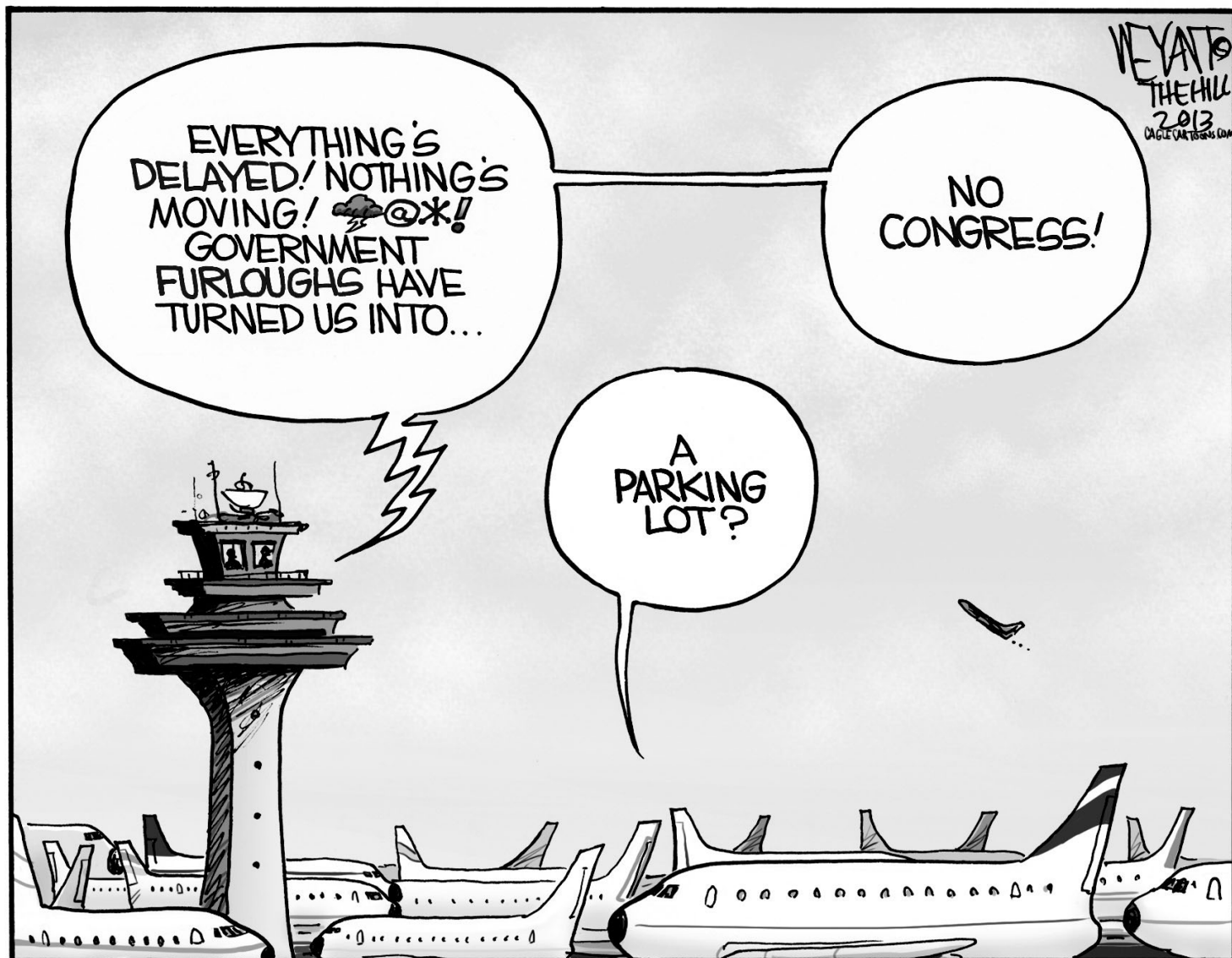
You helped make most of my life a lark. Kudos for the whole shebang."

You're welcome, Mr. Neuharth. Very welcome.



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**BETWEEN THE LINES**



## A glimpse of nature's brilliance

*"I thank you God for this most amazing day...for everything which is natural, which is infinite, which is yes." – e.e. cummings*

In single file, a hundred or more American White Pelicans cruise several feet over shallow water within view of my kitchen window. Others, more daring perhaps, coast only inches above the surface. Their watery reflections below mirror an awkward grace.

"They are social birds and typically travel in flocks, American White Pelicans, *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*, often strung out in a line. They also breed in groups called colonies, which typically gather on islands."

Aerodynamically, pelicans are not supposed to be able to fly. Yet, before my eyes is this improbability hungering mysteriously in brooding morning light.

Stretching along the distant shore, they are making these shallow waters a stopover in their migratory log.

Arrowing close behind and intermingled is an entourage of coronets, clustered shoulder-to-shoulder in this resting place. Save the seagulls, shrieking in protest, as feathered thugs, staking their territory against a faded gray April sky and barren trees, still dormant.

"A huge white bird with a nine-foot wingspan, the American White Pelican has an enormous orange bill pouch. Breeding adults have a laterally flattened horn on the upper mandible. During flight, their long necks are folded back on their bodies."

### Guest commentary:

## Earth Day is reason to celebrate ag

BY GOV. DENNIS DAUGAARD

South Dakotans across our great state take pride in our rich and diverse landscape. We all have a connection to the land, from the Black Hills to the wide-open spaces of the Great Plains.

Earth Day, April 22, is an opportunity to celebrate not only the beautiful recreational landscape we enjoy, but the working lands in the care of farmers and ranchers from east to west.

Having grown up on a farm, I know how precious the land is to South Dakotans who owe their livelihoods to our natural resources. Our farmers and ranchers take great care to maintain those resources for generations to come.

To recognize those who are dedicated to land and wildlife conservation efforts, the South Dakota Cattlemen's Association, South Dakota Grassland Coalition and the Wisconsin-based Sand County Foundation bestow the Leopold Conservation Award on a farm or ranch family that demonstrates outstanding conservation leadership. The

award is named for renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold.

This year's Leopold Conservation Award recipients, Pat and Mary Lou Guptill, are living examples of agricultural leadership in conservation. On their 7,000-acre cattle ranch near Quinn, the Guptills have enhanced the health of their land to make the ranch more profitable in the short and long terms. The Guptill family's strong stewardship of their Jackson County land will help maintain the strength of our agricultural economy for years to come.

For more information on the Guptill Ranch or the many other conservation practices that farmers and ranchers currently employ, visit [www.leopoldconservationaward.org](http://www.leopoldconservationaward.org).

Congratulations to the Guptill family and all the other landowners across South Dakota who take great care with our natural resources. Their dedication ensures our lands remain productive for future generations.

### MY STORY YOUR STORY



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wingspans.

Coming in for a landing, they form a foraging pelican court, plunging feet-first into fish-swollen waters. And finally, dunk their long expandable throat-beaks to snare their prey, as though bowing to the God of sustenance.

Dry air is dampened by splash-splashing as orange webbed feet gracefully land, causing a spilling current, as a halo, ever circling the arriving sojourners.

"These large birds use their elastic pouches to catch fish by swimming in cooperative groups, forming a "U" shape and driving fish into shallow water by beating their wings on the surface and then scoop them."

Preaching Canada Geese feverishly churn above these new congregates, prattling possessively in calamitous pursuit of the Pelicans.

Not shaken by such babble, the Pelicans, with beaks facing south toward

A fluttering fusion of waterfowl, this Pelican clan flits about one moment. The next, play follow-the-leader, taking off down their water runway, gaining elevation and then circling 100 or so feet above, grazing as cattle on stubble cropland, steadily coasting with ever so slight modulation of their broad

warmer days and backs stiffening against uninvited north winds, settle into a stoically worried watch.

"The nest of an American White Pelican is a depression on the ground with a built-up rim of mud, rocks and plants."

Bearing strikingly white luminous wings with peppered edges, these regal waterfowl float imperiously on water beds dressed in the dingy brown of springtime – their summery betrothal suspended by winter's jealous intervention.

"American White Pelicans don't store fish in their pouches. When they catch fish, they tip their pouches back to drain water and then swallow the fish whole. Young ones feed by sticking their bills into their parents' throats. Both parents help feed the young. Their song is mostly silent."

I take it by their iced silence that all is well – as though an immutable source of calm has looked up the truth, ratifying a new proclamation to a shared future no longer forlorn by greed.

These migrant standard-bearers present a migratory parade, a re-coronation processing down the narrow perennial passageway to survival.

Their presence has changed the day's tenor from gloom to zeal, imparting light and inhabiting promise for any soul, ransomed and peering here with awe and wonder at such a display as this.

Sources:  
[www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com),  
[www.birdweb.org](http://www.birdweb.org).

## SOUTH DAKOTA EDITORIAL ROUNDUP

The Associated Press

Capital Journal, Pierre, April 14, 2013

### 'Controlled burn' was uncontrolled, beurocratic bungling

South Dakota Sen. John Thune is right: The U.S. Forest Service should take steps now to reimburse landowners for damage to private property caused when the agency attempted a "controlled burn" of 135 acres near the North Dakota/South Dakota border. Instead the fire burned out of control, consuming perhaps as much as 14,000 acres in North Dakota and nearby Perkins County, S.D., damaging privately owned hay land, pasture land, harvested hay, fences, at least one building and personal vehicles.

The fire began April 3 and was contained by April 7.

This past week's wet, heavy snowfall has provided some much-needed moisture in areas. But the fact that people in South Dakota are so relieved to get the moisture calls in question the Forest Service's

management decision to attempt a controlled burn earlier this month.

While North Dakota hasn't been as hard-hit as South Dakota in this drought, the area closest to the South Dakota state line is in severe drought (and just south of it is a vast area of South Dakota where drought conditions are classified as extreme and exceptional, the two worst categories for classifying drought).

We doubt any rancher on the planet would attempt a "controlled burn" under such circumstances. Indeed, Sen. Thune's letter to the U.S. Forest Service indicates that the agency ignored warnings from ranchers that it was a bad time to attempt a controlled burn.

Sounds to us as though reimbursing landowners for losses is only job one in this situation. Beyond that, the Forest Service should consider whether its policies allow it to consult with local landowners on decisions of this sort where local knowledge, in this case, could have saved everyone trouble and money.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Plain Talk 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 Plain Talk 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 to the Editor, 201 W. Cherry St., Vermillion, SD 57069, drop off at 201 W. Cherry in Vermillion, fax to 624-4696 or e-mail to [david.lias@plaintalk.net](mailto:david.lias@plaintalk.net).

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