

VIEWPOINTS

Act like an American

The drama has been at a fever pitch recently, and I'm not talking about the University of South Dakota's staging of "Les Misérables" in Vermillion this week.

The theatrics has occurred a few miles north of here, in the Sioux Falls School District, and the script of this public staging of people's passions has centered on the Pledge of Allegiance.

Here's how this soap-operatic saga began.

According to KELO-TV, the issue started when Marcus Hicks, a senior at Washington High School in Sioux Falls, wondered why the students did not recite the Pledge of Allegiance in high school. Hicks posted a comment about it on Facebook. His grandmother saw the comment, and went to a local veterans' group with her concern. The veterans asked the board earlier this month to require reciting the pledge at the high school level.

Sioux Falls stopped requiring high school students to recite the pledge in the 1970s. The Sioux Falls school board's initial vote on this issue earlier this month expanded mandatory saying of the Pledge of Allegiance up to the middle school level, but they reaffirmed the current policy at the high school level. Board members explained that high school teachers were free to lead their classes in the pledge, but that they didn't want to add another requirement for high school classrooms.

KELO, however, incorrectly reported that the school board voted to end mandatory reciting of the pledge at high schools. Fox News picked up on the story, and, well, you can imagine the tempest that ensued.

KSFY-TV, (with a news department that has accurately

BETWEEN THE LINES



DAVID LIAS
david.lias@plaintalk.net

reported on this issue from the start) was told by Sioux Falls school board member Kent Alberty that board members had received hate mail and death threats, mostly from outside the area. Alberty says that one such threat called for all of the school board members to be lined up and shot.

Inaccurate reporting aside, and despite the fact that the Sioux Falls board had actually expanded the reciting of the pledge to include middle school students, there were enough people in the district with their red, white and blue boxes in a bunch to keep pressing the issue.

Earlier this week, the board relented. It has agreed to allow time for high school students in the Sioux Falls district to recite the pledge each day.

It's a decision that evidently had made some parents and other citizens happy, particularly veterans who lectured board members Monday night.

"Shame on you for thinking you were going to take a vote on a topic like this the day after Veterans Day and not draw some attention. America isn't as asleep at the wheel as some people think we are," U.S. Navy veteran Dave Saunders told the board during a bit of chest thumping that went on at the Monday meeting.

I must admit that I don't know which schools in Vermillion recite the pledge. I have a feeling that elementary

students here do. I've done stories about people from the community, usually veterans, who visit the school and teach youngsters about the flag, proper etiquette, and how to run it up the flagpole every morning and fold it when they bring it back inside at the end of the day.

I'm a bit disappointed in the Sioux Falls school board's decision. There should be some conditions attached.

Students should actually learn something in the process. They should be taught about the pledge itself. They should learn how it originated as, for all practical purposes, a sales gimmick.

The pledge was written in 1892 by a Christian Socialist, Francis Bellamy, as part of an advertising campaign for The Youth's Companion, one of the country's best known and highly regarded magazines. Taking advantage of deep anxiety among Anglo-Saxon Protestants about an increase in immigration during the final decades of the 19th Century, The Youth's Companion hatched a scheme to turn nationalism into profit.

Through its premium department (essentially a mail order service that sold goods at discounted prices to lure new subscribers), the magazine began selling American flags and promoting the idea of putting one in every school. Seeing the opportunity to link the magazine and its flag drive to a high profile celebration of Columbus Day in October of 1892, one of the magazine's marketers, James Upham, asked Bellamy to craft a pledge of allegiance that would accompany the ceremonial raising of the flag.

Bellamy wasn't exactly a nice guy. Some describe him as a bigot

and a xenophobe. Such labels appear to be fairly accurate, considering that besides the pledge, he also made these frightening statements in an editorial for the Illustrated American:

"A democracy like ours cannot afford to throw itself open to the world...Where all classes of society merge insensibly into one another every alien immigrant of inferior race may bring corruption to the stock. There are races more or less akin to our own whom we may admit freely and get nothing but advantage by the infusion of their wholesome blood. But there are other races, which we cannot assimilate without lowering our racial standard, which we should be as sacred to us as the sanctity of our homes."

Hence, while the pledge of allegiance is widely regarded as a celebration of our patriotism and the "liberty and justice" upon which our nation was founded, its genesis can be traced to far more sinister fears about the racial, ethnic, and religious contamination that many Americans believed immigrants would bring with them.

Students should also learn when and why the words "under God" were added to the pledge. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, as Americans grew increasingly concerned about the threat of communism, there was a movement to add the phrase "under God" to the pledge. This movement, which coincided with a variety of attempts to inject religion into the public sphere in order to differentiate America from the godless communists, was ultimately successful. In 1954, Congress officially recognized the phrase "under God" in the pledge of allegiance – over 60 years after it

was originally written and almost 200 years after our founding fathers labored to establish a nation that kept the church and state separate.

Students should be taught about the great melting pot in which they live, and how America is becoming more and more diverse. That means the chances of them encountering people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds than their own are growing rapidly. There is a likelihood that a classmate, even a close friend, may abstain from reciting the pledge because of religious or other beliefs. Thus, providing time for the pledge also offers the opportunity to teach young people that citizens who choose not to recite it are not any less American.

Patriotism is an important part of being a citizen, and the pledge is part of that. But it certainly isn't the most important criteria. Nor is it a requirement.

It's the day-to-day stuff – actions that usually don't generate news – that ultimately defines us as Americans. That's the message our young people should and hopefully do receive early on, with no decrees from the government required.

Want to truly enjoy American liberty and justice? It's simple. Act like an American. Watch out for your fellow women and men. You will encounter people who are hungry or have suffered loss or are hurting. Help feed and comfort them. Volunteer in your community. Pay your taxes. Deliver meals on wheels. Think about attending the community's Veterans Day and Memorial Day services. Vote.

And, if you wish, say the Pledge of Allegiance. Understand, however, that reciting those words likely will have the least impact of everything else you have the potential to do for your country.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Thankful for local insight

"Aha," indeed, David! The feat of preserving the landmarks of downtown Vermillion pulses with promise! The 16 women pictured, and the other female and male entrepreneurs who were not shown were aware that, over time, Vermillion's perpetually self-sustaining economic stability lays in its heritage and in its Divinely-endowed beauty.

Nearly all of the buildings in Vermillion's downtown district, were built soon after the disastrous flood of 1881 and testify to the ingenuity of a group of people, ingrained with Christian values, who – in spite of the calamity – persevered. Many of their homes, churches and government buildings were gone. Their cash to buy food and pay debts had floated down the river. Willing to consider

the ideas of others, left-brained and right-brained thinkers worked together and solved their problem. To be protected from flooding in the future, the town was moved to the top of the hill. To be aesthetically satisfying it was plotted by the Dakota Territory to include the area along the edge of the bluff. Obstructions to the awesome view laying beyond were removed. There, with a commonality of purpose, the shops, churches, community buildings and cemetery were established.

The entrepreneurs featured in your Nov. 1, 2013 Plain Talk issue, David, commendably mirror the characteristics and ingenuity inherent in the builders of the landmarks which they have preserved.

I thank them for their insightfulness.

Edis J. Anderson
Vermillion



Damon: How to kick that old stuffing habit

"Cooking is like love. It should be entered into with abandon or not at all." Harriet Van Horne, American newspaper columnist

When it comes to turkey stuffing, I get really tired of the same ole, same ole: celery, onion, stale bread, sage, butter, blah, blah, blah. Yawner!

In my mind, I am thinking the family will love my new approach to turkey stuffing. I can picture all of them on their best behavior, their smiling eyes, their salivating grins and their poised forks, eager to indulge.

Stuffing the bird with fruit or squash would be a step in the right direction. But, I said to myself, go ahead, live on the wild side, for once.

Why not cook up something inventive, like pepperoni and mozzarella dressing, replacing breadcrumbs and sage with pizza crust and Italian seasonings?

Or, try an Asian stuffing with Chinese sticky rice, mushrooms and water chestnuts, seasoned with

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PAULA DAMON
paula.damon@iw.net

soy sauce and then wrapped in lotus leaves. I must admit – the more I searched for new ways to dress my gobble, gobble the harder my heart pounded with excitement, the louder my stomach growled with hunger pangs, the more my mouth watered over new combinations and the weirder the recipes became.

Try turkey dressing made with corn chips? Sounds easy enough. All I need to do is follow my traditional recipe – only replace bread cubes with tortilla chips. Uh, not too sure about how soggy corn chips would go over. Cancel that one.

Now for a completely unexpected texture with a "sage-y" taste, there's popcorn/cornbread stuffing. Combining two parts popcorn and one part cornbread, onion, melted butter, eggs, chicken broth and rosemary would be delish and a total surprise to everyone gathered around the table on Thanksgiving Day.

Straight from the "The Twinkie Cookbook," I found a recipe for a Twinkie-based turkey dressing; although I would dread the tedious job of scooping out the creamy middles, crumbling what's left of the Twinkie cakes and then mixing in corn muffins, chopped apples and honey. And, here's the weird part, you don't even use the filling. It's not even a Twinkie anymore. It's something else, I don't know – a Twinkie that's lost its soul. And then what do you do with the filling, since, heaven knows, that can't go to waste. Does it still have a seven-year shelf life even without the cake wrapped around it?

Sounds like way too much work to me for a meal that takes on average five hours to prepare and only 12 minutes to eat. Plus, it's far too sweet for my taste, so I crossed it off my bucket list of new ones to try.

When I came across a turkey dressing recipe called "Evil Turkey Stuffing" with only a jar of roasted red peppers, whiskey, minced garlic and chipotle chilies simmered to the consistency of tomato sauce, I knew I had to rein it in and go with something a little more traditional, but with a new twist or two from my old stuffing habits.

So, I had a "Come to Jesus" meeting with myself and asked WWMD [What would Mom do?]

And then it came to me! My mother, God rest her soul, always added sausage or some sort of cooked, seasoned ground meat to her turkey dressing. Come to find out, Mom wasn't too far off, since there is such a thing as White Castle Turkey Stuffing. Yes, it is exactly as it sounds. Starting with a 10-pound

turkey, the recipe calls for 10 fast food hamburgers [hold the lettuce] cubed and mixed with the standard onion, celery and sage.

Better yet [sorry, Mom] how about smoked bacon and cornbread dressing? It calls for unsalted butter, softened; a bunch fresh sage, chopped; salt, kosher; black pepper, freshly ground; two large onions, finely chopped; a loaf cornbread, lightly crumbled; one egg, whisked; heavy cream, whipped; chicken stock, heated; pure maple syrup, dark; water, hot; bacon, smoked; flour, all-purpose and half of a lemon, ripe.

In my mind, I am thinking the family will love my new approach to turkey stuffing. I can picture all of them on their best behavior, their smiling eyes, their salivating grins and their poised forks, eager to indulge.

Then again?
Maybe not.

Vermillion



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Vermillion Plain Talk Staff

News Staff: Travis Gulbrandson.

Advertising Director: Michele Schievelbein

Advertising Sales Rep: Carol Hohenthaner

Composing Manager: Kathy Larson

Composing Staff: Rob Buckingham,

Mathew Wienbar & Sally Whiting.

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