



David Lias
Between The Lines

The power of a good apology

In a column in the Wall Street Journal last April, Karl Rove, former senior adviser and deputy chief of staff to President George W. Bush, wrote that President Barack Obama had finished the second leg of his international confession tour. "In less than 100 days, he has apologized on three continents for what he views as the sins of America and his predecessors," he wrote.

The president told the French earlier this year that America "has shown arrogance and been dismissive, even derisive" toward Europe.

In Prague, Rove wrote, President Obama said America has "a moral responsibility to act" on arms control because only the U.S. had "used a nuclear weapon."

In London, he said that decisions about the world financial system were no longer made by "just Roosevelt and Churchill sitting in a room with a brandy." And in Latin America, he said the U.S. had not "pursued and sustained engagement with our neighbors" because we "failed to see that our own progress is tied directly to progress throughout the Americas."

You can guess that these words, coming from Rove, weren't written in support of the president's actions. Apologizing, in Rove's eyes, is a sign of weakness in the character of our chief executive. "That may win short-term applause from foreign audiences," Rove concludes, "but do little for what should be the chief foreign policy preoccupation of any U.S. president: advancing America's long-term interests."

It's clear that Rove didn't grow up in the Lias household, which during my childhood, could at times have easily resembled The Jerry Springer Show if not for one overwhelming presence: my mother. She somehow survived raising five boys, who acted like, well, boys. We'd argue and bicker at times, like all siblings do, and sometimes we'd take things too far.

When that happened, the perpetrator of the incivility would be asked to apologize. As I recall, we were never faced an "apologize or else" threat from Mom. She made it clear that an apology was in order because it was the right thing to do.

Our mother instilled in us the value of a good apology. It was the proper way to take responsibility for a transgression, to think about why we did something that we knew was clearly wrong, and to fully realize that we wouldn't ever make that hurtful mistake again.

I reflect on this because, unlike Rove, the U.S. Senate appears to share at least a small bit of the wisdom my mother possesses.

Last week, The Senate approved a resolution apologizing to American Indians for years of "ill-conceived policies" and acts of violence against Native Americans by U.S. citizens.

Lawmakers said the resolution, which was included in a defense spending bill approved Tuesday, Oct. 6, was a symbolic gesture meant to promote healing and promote a renewed commitment to tribal communities. Republican Sam Brownback of Kansas and Democrat Byron Dorgan of North Dakota introduced the resolution.

The current apology resolution was careful to state that it is not meant to authorize or support any claim against the U.S. government or serve as a settlement of any claim. It "recognizes that there have been years of official deprivations, ill-conceived policies and the breaking of covenants by the federal government regarding tribes," and "apologizes on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native Peoples for many instances of violence, maltreatment and neglect inflicted on" American Indians by U.S. citizens.

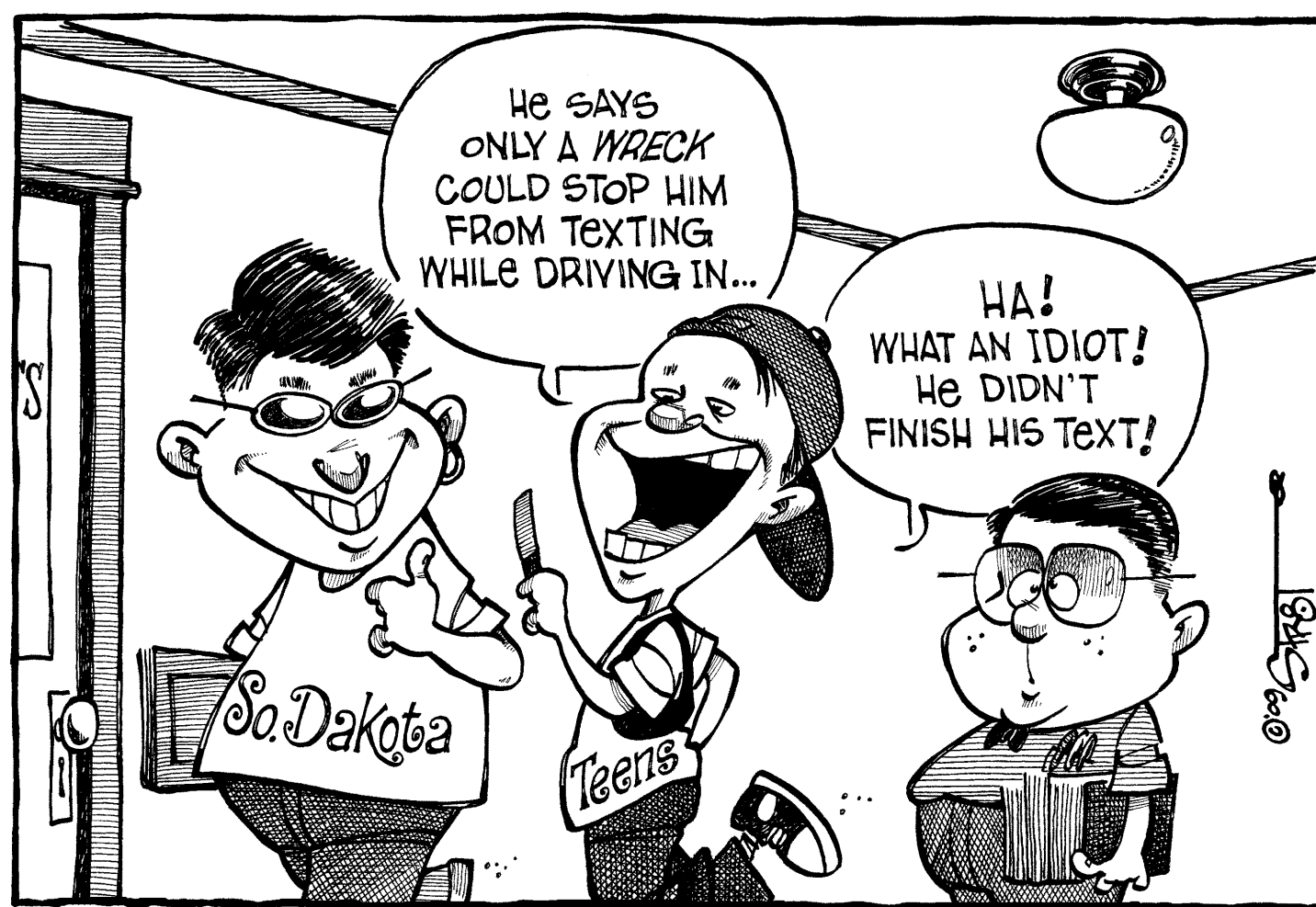
President Obama is urged in the resolution to "acknowledge the wrongs of the United States against Indian tribes" in order to encourage healing.

Lawmakers who represent large tribal communities said it should not stand in place of additional federal aid through improved health care and public safety. "Native Americans deserve an apology. But they deserve much more than that," said Sen. Tim Johnson (D-SD).

"The real issue, I think, is what are we are doing to improve the conditions on the reservations," said Sen. John Thune (R-SD).

Will such an apology immediately make life better in Indian Country in South Dakota? Of course not. Just as the apologies the president issued earlier this year offer no magic solution to the United States' poor relations in many regions of the globe.

Such expressions of contrition are, however, a good start, despite what Rove says. Just ask my mother.



Always losing things? Ask Tony for help

Normally I don't believe in miracles – but I've got to tell you about a couple that happened to us. Phyllis lost her PEO pin. We searched all over for it without success. Fortunately she ran into a gal who asked her if she had prayed about it to St. Anthony, known as the finder of lost articles.

"It's real easy," she said, "all you have to do is say:

"Tony, Tony, look around; Something's lost that must be found – and you'll find it." We used that little prayer and – sure enough, the pin was located.

It was several years later



Bob Karolevitz
Writer At Large

that Phyllis lost a part of my hearing aid when she took it in to get repaired. When she got to the place where it was supposed to be fixed, it was gone to God knows where. She emptied her purse where she had carried it and it was no where to be found.

She tramped all over the hall ways looking for it. And

it was LOST, LOST, LOST!

Our only recourse was the prayer to St. Anthony.

I didn't think it would work a second time, but I sheepishly agreed to try it again. Hours had gone by and I knew the maintenance man could have been there and vacuumed the area by then.

I said the prayer more skeptically then I did when the PEO pin was located: "Tony, Tony look around. Something's lost and must be found."

Well, the janitor obviously had not been there when Phyllis decided to make another trip to the hallway for a second look to see if she had missed it the first time.

And there it was!

So if you have lost anything – however small – a prayer to St. Anthony of Padua might be your answer!

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Ladies and Gentlemen, please proceed through the gate...

I was supposed to be learning about the colorful career of the USS Cobia during her many WWII battles. The Cobia is berthed in a channel off Lake Michigan at the Wisconsin Maritime Museum in Manitowoc, where I was visiting last week.

However, my attention was totally fixed on the tour guide who led our group through the moored submarine. He was a burping, head-scratching information machine named Kevin. He looked all of 20, maybe 21, but not older.

With what seemed to be the knowledge of an expert submariner, Kevin, belching now and then, motored through his lines so fast that his sentences and paragraphs often ran together in a blurry jumble. Because he so quickly recited facts and figures about the Cobia's capabilities and crew, what he was saying was difficult to follow at times.

"Welcome to the USS Cobia, which was named to the National Registry of Historic Places in 1970. The Cobia fought in WWII, downing Japanese freighters and ships."

It didn't take long for Kevin to become the center of attention.

"The USS Cobia reached Pearl Harbor June 3, 1944. On June 26, she was put to

MyStory YourStory



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Columnist

sea on her first war patrol."

As I followed our small tour group of seven adults through the sub's narrow passages, I grew accustomed to Kevin's long paragraphs, which he recited with eyes tightly closed.

"On July 13, July 17 and July 18 in 1944, the Cobia sank Japanese freighters. The last was a troop transport carrying a Japanese tank regiment to Iwo Jima."

It was as though he might lose his place if he opened his eyes or stopped to catch his breath.

"On July 20, 1944, the USS Cobia sank three small armed ships in a running gun battle. One of them rammed the Cobia, causing minor damage. But the submarine continued her mission, sinking a converted yacht of 500 tons on August 5."

There was nothing elegant or profound about Kevin's tour-guide persona. Even his airline attendant-like arm and hand motions directing our attention around the submarine's interior seemed mechanical.

"What's this valve used for?" one tourist asked.

"That valve allows water to enter the ballast tanks, while the enclosed air escapes through the open main vents at the top of the tanks."

"What are these instruments called?" another tourist inquires, pointing to an intricate series of dials and meters.

"Those are used for radar. The Cobia houses the oldest operating radar set in the world."

At times, Kevin did not immediately know the answers to our questions, which raised my suspicion about his expertise, like the one about the crank in a giant gearbox...

"What's this for?" the tourist with a southern drawl asked.

Kevin fell silent for the first time in 45 minutes. "Hmm," he uttered, scratching his beardless chin. "That's uh." No answer. "That's uh." Still no answer.

He paused cocking his head and scratching it, too. "That's uh – a detection gear called a hydrophone," he

exclaimed self-assuredly. "Hydrophones," he continued, "are extremely simple in concept. A microphone is extended through the bottom of the vessel. By rotating the microphone, the sound operator is able to listen for propeller and machinery noises that might indicate the presence of a submarine."

While crouched with our tour group in the sub's cramped quarters, I listened to Kevin rattle on about the life and times of the USS Cobia and observed his boyish demeanor, which was in sharp contrast to the sophisticated pieces of machinery he was describing.

Whatever it was that he possessed – expertise or an uncanny ability to make stuff up – I was in awe.

A resident of Southeast South Dakota, Paula Damon is a national award-winning columnist. Her columns have won first-place in National Federation of Press Women, South Dakota Press Women and Iowa Press Women Communications Contests. In the 2009 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contest, Paula's columns took three first-place awards. To contact Paula, email pauladamon@iw.net, follow her blog at www.my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on Facebook.

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■ 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.

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