

other view

To end torture, start at home

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The supporters of a military response to the recent deployment of chemical weapons

and the ghastly violence in Syria have said that U.S. credibility is at stake as we consider our responses to the awful war crimes alleged to have been committed by the Assad government.

Unfortunately, our credibility as a nation has been severely compromised already, perhaps well beyond the point where it is worthy of such high-stakes protection — at least not before being restored in good measure.

On April 16, 2013, the bipartisan Task Force on Detainee Treatment sponsored by The Constitution Project issued its 500-page report on the interrogation and treatment of 9/11 detainees. Based on its work over a two-year period, the Task Force concluded that the United States indisputably engaged in torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment (CID) of 9/11 detainees, in violation of U.S. and international law and for which there was no justification. The Task Force indicated the torture occurred in many instances and across a wide range of theaters.

The Task Force also concluded that the decision to use torture and CID came from our top political leaders, including President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. The Task Force found that "the arguments that the nation did not engage in

torture and that much of what occurred should be defined as something less than torture are not credible."

The recommendations include:

- The people of the United States should have all of the facts on torture — and in particular the Senate.

- The Intelligence Committee report on CIA interrogations should be released to the public.

- The laws against torture should be strengthened to prevent a repeat of past mistakes.

- The United States should not transfer detainees to countries where torture is likely to occur.

- Physicians should be required to report abuses to authorities.

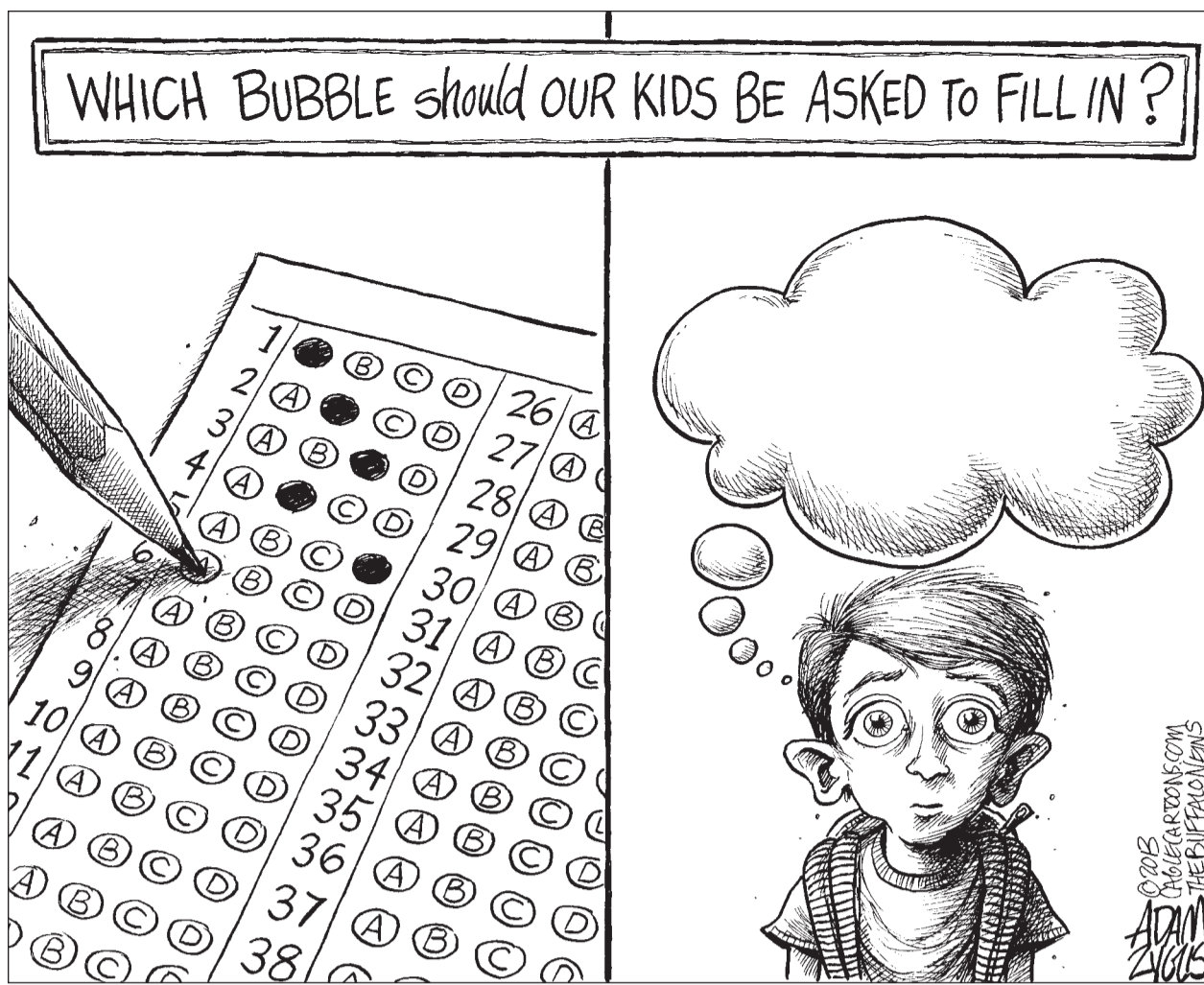
- The executive branch should declassify evidence regarding abuse and torture of captives.

Before stepping into a violent conflict once again, as people of faith we ask: Should we not heed the key recommendations of the task force? Are these not the kind of critical action steps more essential to our integrity, credibility and national interests than punitive military actions, including striking Syria?

I urge all readers to read the task force report, educate others about its findings and advocate for its recommendations. We must build peace with justice. Should we not strike at our own hypocrisy before striking at others? If we fail to do so, we will most certainly generate more ill will and violence.

Let's end torture, and let's start at home. Let's get it right this time. Let us each urge the Senate Intelligence Committee to release the report as soon as possible.

Blevins is founder of the Northeast Iowa Peace and Justice Center Inc. in Decorah.



verbatim FROM EDITORIALS AROUND THE NATION

Scales start to tip against 'automatic gratuity'

By the Chicago Tribune

"Automatic gratuity." Isn't that an oxymoron?

We're talking about the 18 percent (or more) that many restaurants tack on to the bill for large dining parties, usually six people or more.

Instead of presenting the check for the meal and letting the diners decide how generously to reward the service, the house adds a flat charge. Of course you can pay more — and who hasn't done so, by accident? — but you can't pay less.

That practice might be on its way out. Starting in January, the IRS will regard those payments as wages, not tips, which could lead to higher payroll taxes for the restaurants. Darden Restaurants, owner of chains including Red Lobster, Olive Garden and LongHorn Steakhouse, has dropped the automatic charges at 100 of its restaurants and might phase them out altogether. Others will surely follow. Good riddance.

Even if you generally tip more than 18 percent, automatic gratuities can't help but rub you the wrong way. Tipping is supposed to be discretionary — nay, voluntary. Some customers have even sued, saying it's not up to a restaurant to say how big the tip should be.

People who work for tips (and their bosses) say the charges are just meant to make sure the workers are fairly compensated. Waitresses, bartenders and busboys rely on tips to supplement their less-than-minimum wages.

Most customers get that. In a recent survey by discount firm couponcodes4u.com, 63 percent said they felt obliged to tip, even for poor service. A Cornell University

study found that customers rarely vary the size of their tips by much, regardless of the quality of service. A 5 percent tipper will almost always give 15 percent.

An automatic gratuity is not a tip, though. It's a service charge. And often a big one.

Yes, large parties are a lot of work. Anyone who's been seated in the same dining room as, say, Grandpa's 80th birthday celebration, knows a big table can keep several servers scrambling, often at the expense of other disgruntled diners.

Big groups can be hard to impress too. Just getting all the plates to the table at the same time is an under-appreciated logistical feat. At the end of the meal, a bunch of tipsy diners divvy up the check and argue about how much to leave the servers. If a big table leaves a little tip, the wait staff could actually lose money.

Fair enough. But from a customer's perspective, a predetermined tip is mighty presumptuous. A server who doesn't have to earn his or her tips has little incentive to try, and the customer has no choice but to pay a premium anyway. Twice, sometimes. A customer might not notice — and the server might not mention — that the bill already includes a gratuity. A big one.

That's dishonest.

True, customers can be arbitrary and demanding. They can take out their frustrations on the wait staff when the kitchen is to blame. But a restaurant that runs on tips professes to run on accountability. The better the dining experience, the bigger the tip.

Superior service ought to be in the eye — and the pocketbook — of the beholder.

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