

OPINION

FIRST AMENDMENT “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

OUR VIEW

Take a time out

A rift between our very own state senator and governor may require a time out by both.

And when we say time out, we mean the kind that more often sends very much younger people to a quiet corner where they are instructed to think about their actions.

What Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk calls a miscommunication by both he and Gov. Mark Dayton, Dayton has called backstabbing. And it's all been played out in public. Ouch.

While we wholeheartedly embrace transparency in government, we think the governor's reaction and harsh comments about Bakk's action may have been better said in private directly to Bakk's face.

For DFLers across the state, it may be a bit scary to watch the state's top Democrats air their dirty laundry in television spots and in newspaper quotes. It feels kind of like mom and dad arguing before dinner, but in this case the silent treatment may have been a better choice than sorting out in front of the kids the details of the disagreement.

Clearly, Dayton was angry, upset and frustrated by

what he sees as a betrayal by Bakk, who offered an amendment to delay pay raises Dayton attempted to implement. Bakk said the governor was authorized to do what he wanted to do, but should have told him about a study that could justify the pay raises for state commissioners. But Dayton did not tell Bakk. And Bakk said he should have told the governor he would attempt to delay the pay raises until they can be further reviewed. But Bakk did not tell Dayton.

The rift shouldn't hinder or delay the business of the Legislature and governor, said Bakk. And our senator said it's not the first time, and we say probably won't be the last time, the state Capitol has been site of political pain between party members. It didn't stall the legislative process then, and won't this time, Bakk said.

If it does, both may be to blame.

That said, it's time for Dayton and Bakk to talk quietly between themselves to put this spat aside. And then move forward with conducting the public business of Minnesota and Minnesotans.

How to contact your lawmakers

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GUEST COLUMNS

Bob Simon: A reporter's reporter



Dick
POLMAN

I'll tell you a little story about Bob Simon, the veteran CBS News correspondent who was killed Wednesday night in a car crash after having survived innumerable wars over five decades.

At age 49 in early 1991, Simon was dispatched to cover the Persian Gulf War, but he disliked the Pentagon's ground rules. Reporters had to travel with military escorts to pre-approved locations, and all their reports had to be "reviewed" by officers in the field. As I wrote at the time — I was assigned full-time to cover the censorship issue — these were "the most restrictive rules of any modern U.S. war." In one instance, when a reporter wanted to describe the U.S. Air Force pilots as "giddy," and the censors insisted that the word be changed to "proud."

Bob Simon refused to abide by these rules, which successfully sanitized most of the coverage. He thought the public had the right to know what was really going on. And so, accompanied by a producer, a cameraman, and a soundman, he took off on his own, breaching a border between Saudi Arabia and Iraqi-occupied Kuwait. But Saddam Hus-

sein's soldiers arrested and shipped them to an infamous Baghdad jail.

Simon was starved by his captors, and beaten with canes and truncheons. His mouth was pried open so his captors could spit in it. He later recalled, "We got beaten up a lot, and badly, but in my mind, I found I reached a certain accommodation with the beatings. Your instinct immediately afterward is to check, 'Can I see? Can I hear? Am I OK in the vital parts?'"

He had no idea how the war was going. He was convinced that he would be executed, that his captors saw him not as an American hostile or even as a suspected spy, but as a Jew. "It was not out of anti-Semitism per se, but once they knew I was Jewish, it was just beyond the range

of their imagination that a Jew who would cross the line into Iraqi-held territory could be a bona fide journalist working for an American news organization," Simon acknowledged in an interview.

Simon was freed after 40 days — whereupon he went back into the field. He had been covering wars since the late 1960s, when he was beaten by Northern Ireland extremists, and he wasn't about to change. He covered wars in Cyprus, the Falkland Islands, Yugoslavia, and the U.S. actions in Grenada, Somalia and Haiti. He covered the latter stage of America's losing effort in Vietnam — at one point, reporting on the deaths of child refugees in Quang Tri Province, he finished with, "There's nothing left to say about this war. There's just nothing left to say" — and he hitched a ride on one of the last U.S. helicopters leaving Saigon in 1975. As a foreign bureau chief, he chose to live in Tel Aviv, and joked that "I'm probably the only journalist who goes there to relax."

He won 25 Emmys, including a Lifetime Achievement Award, and he had corporate courage as well. In 1988, at a time when CBS Sports had a lucrative

deal with the Olympic Committee to cover the winter games in Nagano, Japan, Simon did a CBS News report about how chicanery and bribes had inspired the awarding of the winter games to Nagano, Japan.

Jeff Fagler, his executive producer at 60 Minutes, summed it up Wednesday night: "Bob was a reporter's reporter. He was driven by a natural curiosity. It is such a tragedy made worse because we lost him in a car accident, a man who has escaped more difficult situations than almost any journalist in modern times."

A reporter's reporter... That's the key descriptive. Because for every Brian Williams, for every fabulist like Stephen Glass and Jayson Blair, there are unsung scads of journalists who play the game right. Let Bob Simon's extraordinary life and career serve as a reminder.

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Boehner, Netanyahu helping Iran

BY JASON STANFORD

What would it look like if politics stopped at the water's edge? It wouldn't look like the mess that John Boehner created by inviting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address a session of Congress on March 3. By allowing Netanyahu to stage what is effectively a campaign event in the U.S. Capitol, congressional Republicans have not only damaged our relations with Israel but threatened our diplomatic negotiations with Iran.

Even for Boehner, who gets a gold star when he doesn't let the government shut down, this is a big screw up.

It's one thing to turn an attack on the U.S. into a partisan drinking word-BENGHAZI!!-but we can all agree that Israel is an important ally, and Iran should never have a nuclear bomb. By trying to one-up Obama, Boehner exposed how much he's willing to put political gamesmanship ahead of adult statesmanship.

With about two weeks before Netanyahu's speech, it's getting tense:

Joe Biden made up an excuse about a prearranged trip to a country to be named

later so it doesn't look like he's taking sides in Israel's upcoming elections.

Haaretz, the leading English-language source for news about Israel, wrote that the Boehner-Netanyahu power play is "sabotaging Israel's most precious asset," that is, close relations with the United States. The U.S. Ambassador has warned Israeli officials that, "Ultimately, this will have a price" if Netanyahu uses the U.S. Capitol as a stage to criticize ongoing U.S.-led diplomatic negotiations.

And though everyone would like this to be about a big partisan slap fight in D.C., the real threat isn't to our relationship with Israel. This is election-year posturing by Netanyahu. He needs votes, and then he'll need foreign aid. He'll get over it. The real problem is that by allowing himself to be used as a pawn by Obama's political enemies, Netanyahu is helping Iran.

"Unknowningly, Netanyahu has become the Iranians' secret weapon. If he didn't exist, the Iranians would have to invent him. Destroying the strategic alliance with America would be a real existential threat to Israel, but so far, he's much closer to leaving scorched earth in Washington than

he is to stopping Iran's centrifuges. In this situation, Iranian leaders don't have to do a thing but sit in front of the television, eat popcorn and laugh," wrote Barak Ravid in Haaretz recently.

Oh yeah. Iran.

March is not just when Israelis go to the polls but the next deadline in the diplomatic efforts to keep Iran from building a nuclear bomb. Right now, the U.S. is leading six countries in seeking a negotiated settlement with Iran that would prevent them from becoming a member of the nuclear club. This effort, which began under George W. Bush, has kept Iran's nuclear program frozen in place for years.

These countries-Russia, China, the United Kingdom, France, German, and the U.S.-are using a combination of sanctions, inspections, monitoring, and the ever-present threat of having drones move into the neighborhood to pressure Iran into giving up their capacity to enrich uranium. There are signs that we could be getting close to a deal.

But that's not good enough for those who would oppose breathing if Obama called for clean air. To be fair, conservatives think

the only way to make their way in the world is first threatening and then using force. It's the whole "peace through strength" thing they go on about. Or they just want to forget the whole peace thing and go ahead and bomb Iran.

What they haven't said is how this ends if we do it their way. We can't bomb them into forgetting how to build a nuclear bomb. Should we disengage from diplomacy and just glare at them? Do we go to war and then, what, endlessly prop up a moderate government? The only way to keep Iran from getting the bomb is to negotiate it away.

That's a goal we should all be able to get behind, but by infecting diplomacy with partisanship, congressional Republicans are giving Iranians an excuse to walk away from the table which is exactly why politics should stop at the water's edge. United we stand, divided we grandstand.

Stanford's columns are distributed exclusively by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate. Stanford is a regular contributor to the Austin American-Statesman, a Democratic consultant and a Truman National Security Project partner.