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Now is the time for water-rights reform

Enormous splotches of cancer-like drought consuming some of a nation's most productive agricultural lands: If CIA analysts saw the same thing happening in Africa, Asia or Latin America, they would warn of near-term economic and social upheaval. It's happening here in America and though nobody is predicting food riots right away, a substantial governmental and personal response is essential.

The U.S. Drought Monitor (droughtmonitor.unl.edu) has been a source of worry for several years but is particularly worrisome this spring. With the exception of Montana and Wyoming, the mainland Western states are on track to repeat the dry pattern of recent years. Now in late March when conditions might usually be expected to be moist, 60 percent of the West has some degree of water shortage — 7.23 percent in the worst, exceptional form of dead dryness. Years of this means that stored water and groundwater are being rapidly depleted. By its definition, NASA warned this month that California is working its way through its last year of water.

Crucial food-growing areas of California and Midwestern states like Kansas are in the grip of conditions that will drive up food prices, putting greater strain on families that already struggle to balance monthly expenses. Affordable food has been one of America's key advantages. The California Farm Water Coalition points out U.S. consumers pay just 6.2 percent of their disposable income on food, compared to 10.2 percent in 28 other high-income countries. At the same 10.2 percent rate, U.S. families would have to increase the amount they spend on their food budget by almost \$4,000 per year, the coalition's Mike Wade commented to *The Wall Street Journal*.

Allocating water in a time of scarcity will stretch the current boundaries of legal ingenuity. Water law is a topic highly peculiar to the U.S. West, a field that has sparked epic lawsuits and actu-

al shootouts. We're fast coming to a time when this untouchable topic will have to be dealt with. As an Oregon State University Extension crop scientist told *The Oregonian* last week, "At what point does it go from being a dry spell to just having to accept where we are today and where we're going?"

This crisis is generating a lot of discussion. In Southern Oregon, water users are awaiting congressional authorization of a set of agreements that will help settle water-sharing issues between farms, tribes and wildlife. In California, a venture capitalist and a journalist have proposed a new free market to buy and sell water like any other commodity, rather than narrowly linking specific water to specific land as the law now mandates. Other responses include a Facebook campaign seeking to make vegetable gardening a standard offering in public schools.

Western water was initially parceled out based on whomever first began using it for certain recognized beneficial purposes — usually by 19th century farmers and ranchers, and then eventually by growing cities. Byzantine court decisions and rural politics driven by property-rights philosophies make it astoundingly difficult to effect changes in this system.

Changes must happen. Like requisitioning iron in a time of war, a time is fast approaching when we will be forced to develop ways to get water where it will do the most good. Having these debates now will be the best way to avoid food-price shocks and unnecessarily harsh impacts on private water rights.

Build on progress

Republican obsession with Obamacare delivers no value

The malady of our national politics is the illusion of total victory as opposed to compromise. It resembles religious warfare in which the participants are more interested in prevailing ideologically than achieving a practical outcome that involves the other side.

Nowhere is that pattern of behavior more apparent than with Obamacare. President Barack Obama's landmark legislative accomplishment is now the obsession of the Republican Party. The Affordable Care Act is the GOP's prime target, not because the act would insure more Americans, which has popularity. It is because Obama is the *bete noire* of the party's base.

On the fifth anniversary of Obamacare, the *Los Angeles Times* argued that, "... (T)he rational thing for lawmakers to do now would be to build on that progress. But improving the act or even fixing its glitches has never been an option because the debate over Obamacare has always been political, not rational."

There is a certain impracticality to repealing the Affordable Care Act. This rhetoric resembles Sen. Ted Cruz' sweeping statement last week, that he would eliminate the Internal Revenue Service if elected president.

This is hardly the first time that a president or would-be president let emotion trump common sense. As Garry Wills noted, John F. Kennedy's inaugural address made sweeping promises that sounded good and indeed now are part of the nation's top political sound bites. But JFK's rhetoric could not rationally be realized.

Who gets left out in all of this is us, the citizens. As the Times noted, "The act's most tangible effect ... has been to eliminate some of the worst abuses that health insurers practiced on customers not covered by group policies, especially those with preexisting medical conditions." It has "sharply reversed the years-long increase in the number of people who are uninsured."

That is progress, and Republicans ought to build on that, refine it and make it better.

'Inside the Coast Guard' class takes off

By ERHARD GROSS
 For The Daily Astorian

The U.S. Coast Guard Sector Lower Columbia as well as all three ships are always on the alert.

The men and woman of the local command perform a multitude of functions from regulating river traffic to drug interdiction, boating safety to the all-important rescue missions.

We read about some of these activities in the local newspapers and see occasional TV coverage.

Some of our citizens have contact with members of the local contingent and find that there is a lot more than meets the eye. In order to provide more detail on the complex operations of what we see on almost a daily basis, ENCORE (Experience New Concepts of Retirement Education) has, in cooperation with CG Sector Columbia River, organized a program called "Inside the Coast Guard." It provides a detailed look behind the scenes: Who makes which decisions for what operations, geographic distribution of assets and the ultimate responsibility?

The local helicopters and rescue personnel, for instance, receive their orders from the commander of the 13th Coast Guard District (Seattle). The cutters Steadfast and Alert receive their orders from the Pacific Command (Alameda, Calif). Cutter Fir gets its orders from various offices in Seattle.

Encore and the local sector commenced detailed planning for the program in November. By early February, all dates and venues for the different aspects were in place. The three components of the Coast Guard had designated their project officers, and Encore prepared for printing of schedules and promotional materials. Sector commanding officer Capt. Daniel Travers had the opening session on his schedule. The mayors and city managers of Astoria and Warrenton were invited to participate



Submitted photo

The crew of U.S. Coast Guard cutter Alert pauses for a quick photo while refueling in San Diego.

SCHEDULE

Air Station Astoria, March 31, bus departure: 9:30 a.m.
 USCG Cutter Steadfast, April 7, Maritime Museum
 USCG Cutter Fir, April 14, Tongue Point, 9:30 a.m.
 Air Station Astoria, April 21, 9:30 a.m.
 Motor Lifeboat School, April 28, Cape Disappointment, Wash., 9 a.m.
 For information, call 503-338-2566.

in welcoming the listeners and elaborate on the significance of the Coast Guard to their communities.

The day after Encore had its posters printed, the project representative for the Sector, Lt. Cmdr. Joshua Nelson called to say that cutter Fir would not be available at its appointed date of April 21. Fir would be at sea on that date. Fortunately, Nelson was able to switch the second session with the Air Station to April 21 and the Fir to April 14. Among the Fir's divers duties is corralling wayward buoys. Lt. Cmdr. Kristen Serungard, captain is her skipper.

This area is fortunate to have the

Steadfast back in port for the scheduled session on April 7. Its captain, Cmdr. Bitterman, reports that the ship's engine problems during the last patrol in Central American waters delayed its return by several weeks. He and his project officer, Lt. David Kent, have designed a promising program for the public, starting with a reception at the Maritime Museum and subsequent visit to the ship itself.

The final session of the program, April 28, will take place at the Motor Life Boat School at Cape Disappointment. Very few locals have had the privilege to visit the only training facility of its kind in the United States. Its commanding officer, Lt. Scott McGrew, will allow us an insight into his training program and assets.

The Coast Guard is an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Encore has hired a secure bus from the Astoria School District to convey participants free of charge from the Maritime Museum to and from all program locations. Cutter Alert, too, is back in its home port.

It has been a pleasure working with all the personnel who have assisted us in putting together a valuable service to our Coast Guard units and the local communities.

The GOP racing form: First edition

By CHARLES
 KRAUTHAMMER

Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON —No point in wasting time on the Democratic field. There is none. The only thing that can stop Hillary Clinton is an act of God, and he seems otherwise occupied. As does Elizabeth Warren, the only Democrat who could conceivably defeat her.

On to the GOP.

First Tier:

1. Marco Rubio. Trails badly in current polls, ranking seventh at 5 percent, but high upside potential.

Assets: Foreign policy looms uncharacteristically large in the current cycle, and Rubio is the most knowledgeable and fluent current contender on everything from Russia to Cuba to the Middle East. The son of Cuban immigrants, he can break into flawless Spanish (so can Jeb Bush) and speak passionately about the American story in a party that lost the Hispanic vote by 44 points in 2012.

Liabilities (in the primaries): His Gang of Eight immigration apostasy, though his current enforcement-first position has wide appeal. Second, after Barack Obama, will voters want another first-term senator with no executive experience? (Same for Cruz and Paul.)

Major appeal: Fresh, young, dynamic persona is a powerful counterpoint to Clinton fatigue.

Odds: 3-1.

2. Jeb Bush. The consensus favorite (though I remain a bit skeptical). Solid, soft-spoken, serious, with executive experience and significant achievements as governor. What he lacks in passion, he makes up for in substance. And he has shown backbone in sticking to his semi-heretical positions on immigration and Common Core.

Obvious liability: His name.

True, it helps him raise tens of millions of dollars, but it saddles him with legacy and dynastic issues that negate the inherent GOP advantage of running a new vs. old, not-again campaign against Hillary.

Odds: 7-2.

3. Scott Walker. A fine record of conservative achievement. Has shown guts and leadership in taking on labor unions and winning three elections (five if you count proxy elections) against highly energized Democrats.

Good, rousing speech in Iowa, but has stumbled since, flubbing routine questions on evolution and patriotism, then appearing to compare the Islamic State to Wisconsin demonstrators. Rookie mistakes, easily forgotten — if he learns from them.

Pandered on ethanol and fired a staffer who complained about Iowa's unwarranted influence. Sure, everyone panders to Iowa, but Walker's calling card is standing up to pressure.

Most encouraging sign: ability to maintain altitude after meteoric rise. Numbers remain steady. And his speeches continue to impress.

Odds: 4-1.

Second Tier:

4. Chris Christie. Some politicians have their one moment. Christie might have missed his in 2012 when his fearless in-your-face persona was refreshingly new. Over time, however, in-your-face can wear badly. That plus Bridgegate cost him traction and dropped him out of the first tier. Biggest problem: being boxed out ideologically and financially by Jeb Bush for the relatively-moderate-governor-with-cross-aisle-appeal slot. 12-1.

5. Ted Cruz. Grand, florid campaign launch with matching rhetoric. Straightforward base-oriented



Charles Krauthammer

campaign. Has developed a solid following. Could break out, especially in debate. 15-1.

6. Mike Huckabee. Great name recognition, affable, popular. But highly identified with social/cultural issues — how far can that carry him beyond Iowa and evangelicals? 15-1.

7. Rand Paul. Events

have conspired against him. Obama's setbacks and humiliations abroad have created a national mood less conducive to Paul's non-interventionism. His nearly 13-hour anti-drone filibuster would not fly today. Is trying to tack back, even signing the anti-Iran-deal letter of the 47 senators. Strong youth appeal, though outreach to minorities less successful thus far. Bottom line: High floor of devoted libertarians; low ceiling in today's climate. 30-1.

Longer Shots:

8. Carly Fiorina. Getting her footing. Given current societal taboos, she is best placed to attack Hillary and has done so effectively. Can she do a Huckabee 2008 and, through debates, vault to the first tier? Unlikely. But because she's talented and disciplined, not impossible. 50-1.

9. Ben Carson. Polling high, but is a novice making cringe-worthy gaffes, for example, on the origins of Islam and on gay choice ("a lot of people who go into prison go into prison straight, and when they come out, they're gay"). And not knowing that the Baltic States are in NATO. Truly good man, brilliant doctor, great patriot. But not ready for the big leagues. Chance of winning? Zero.

Others:

Bobby Jindal, Rick Perry, Rick Santorum and John Kasich — still below radar. If they surface, they'll be featured in the next racing form.

Where to write

• **U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D):** 2338 Rayburn HOB, Washington, D.C., 20515. Phone: 202-225-0855. Fax: 202-225-9497. District office: 12725 SW Millikan Way, Suite 220, Beaverton, OR 97005. Phone: 503-326-2901. Fax: 503-326-5066. Web: bonamici.house.gov/

• **U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D):** 313 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-3753. Web: www.merkley.senate.gov

• **State Rep. Brad Witt (D):** State Capitol, 900 Court Street N.E.,

H-373, Salem, OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1431. Web: www.leg.state.or.us/witt/ Email: rep.bradwitt@state.or.us

• **State Rep. Deborah Boone (D):** 900 Court St. N.E., H-375, Salem, OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1432. Email: rep.deborah.boone@state.or.us District office: P.O. Box 637, Cannon Beach, OR 97110. Phone: 503-986-1432. Web: www.leg.state.or.us/boone/

• **State Sen. Betsy Johnson (D):** State Capitol, 900 Court St. N.E., S-314, Salem, OR 97301. Telephone:

503-986-1716. Email: sen.betsy.johnson@state.or.us Web: www.betsyjohnson.com District Office: P.O. Box R, Scappoose, OR 97056. Phone: 503-543-4046. Fax: 503-543-5296. Astoria office phone: 503-338-1280.

• **Port of Astoria:** Executive Director, 10 Pier 1 Suite 308, Astoria, OR 97103. Phone: 503-741-3300. Email: admin@portofastoria.com

• **Clatsop County Board of Commissioners:** c/o County Manager, 800 Exchange St., Suite 410, Astoria, OR 97103. Phone: 503-325-1000.