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What, me think?

GOP's willful ignorance on climate change is unilateral disarmament

When Steve Symms entered the U.S. Senate in 1981, supplanting the Democrat Frank Church of Idaho, it was said that single upset dropped the collective intelligence quotient of the Senate. Symms did not distinguish himself during his 12 years as Idaho's junior senator.

To those who watched Symms from the Senate Press Gallery or in the committee rooms, it seemed as though he worked hard at displaying his intellectual shortcoming in the demanding job of being a U.S. senator.

Who knew that Symms was a pioneer?

It now seems as though a requirement to be a Republican congressman or senator is to play dumb. That's what the House Science, Space and Technology Committee did last week by drastically cutting NASA's budget for earth science research. That NASA activity links directly to the study of climate change. The same committee had already made similar cuts in the budgets of the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy.

Writing on *The New Yorker's* website last week, Elizabeth Kolbert noted the mantra which

Republican candidates adopted in the 2014 election. When asked about climate change they would say: "Of course, I'm not a scientist." That disclaimer apparently gives them license to put scientists out of business.

If we think about the lameness of the GOP excuse, shouldn't we all be allowed to question our bank statements by saying, "Of course, I'm not a banker."

Our bankers would not be impressed with that response. And neither is climate change impressed with the Republicans' willful ignorance. Nor are a host of corporations that have already adopted climate change strategies.

And that leads us to what the GOP is really up to. Wrote Kolbert, "... ignoring a problem does often make it more difficult to solve. And that, you have to assume, in a perverse way, is the goal here. What we don't know, we can't act on."

Warmer oceans mean more toxins

Interstate, interagency cooperation becoming increasingly vital

Washington's Pacific County beaches were closed to clam harvests for three out of four previously scheduled days last week because of elevated levels of domoic acid, which can cause amnesic shellfish poisoning in humans.

Domoic acid was unknown on the Pacific Northwest coastline until the early 1990s, but now routinely shows up in samples — usually below the hazard threshold of 20 parts per million. Three people died and many became ill on Prince Edward Island in eastern Canada when it first showed up there in 1987. More often, it results in lesser neurological problems. It's bad for seabirds and a real-life mass poisoning that caused birds to behave strangely is thought to have inspired Alfred Hitchcock's movie, *The Birds*. See tinyurl.com/ktvw52n for more information.

Last week's closure was the first for domoic acid in more than a decade, but it isn't the only illness caused by toxic chemicals contained in the marine algae that serves as food for clams, crab and other commercially important species. In 2010, local clam seasons were truncated because of paralytic shellfish poisoning, also known as red tide. This resulted in cancellation of a set of recreational digging dates. That was the first PSP closure since 1993.

A 2009 study of toxic-algae impacts by the University of Washington found the 2008 razor clam season in Pacific and Grays Harbor counties generated \$12.6 million in local economic activ-

ity. A single scheduled clam season opening on the Long Beach Peninsula can pump \$1.2 million into area businesses, the study found.

Around the world, harmful algal blooms are an issue of increasing concern. Poorly understood, they are blamed on everything from changes in ocean upwelling patterns to run-off of fertilizers and other chemicals. Last week's problem in Washington is believed to have originated in a pool of warm seawater off Clatsop County. Oregon officials planned to conduct tests of clams from Clatsop beaches to see if they, too, are above safe domoic acid levels.

Warmer water along the Pacific Coast is credited with producing pleasant winter weather the past two years, with a dawning possibility for another such year ahead, with a strong El Niño forming in the central Pacific, the warmest since 1991. An Australian newspaper reported on May 8, "Some models generated by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and not widely seen are pointing to 'humungous anomalies' of as much as 5 degrees by October-November for parts of the eastern Pacific." Anything like this surge in ocean heat is likely to produce many side effects — including more toxic algae blooms.

It is clear that Washington and Oregon must continue working with universities, NOAA and other agencies in an effort to better understand these runaway algal blooms and the problems they cause.

Mothers, presidents and family ties

By DAVID BROOKS
New York Times News Service

Americans are embarrassed. Over the last 35 years there have only been two elections without a Bush or Clinton on the national ticket.

Next year both names could rest atop the ballot. In one poll voters saw this as a bad thing by a ratio of 8 to 1.

Some of the people who are upset have a false view of how life works. Since Thomas Hobbes, many people have embraced the illusory notion that society is made up of individuals. According to this view the only fair competition is between individuals, without undue benefit from family connections.

But no society has ever been this way. Individuals don't come fully formed. They emerge out of families and groups. The family and group is the essential social unit. These collectives have always shaped public life.

According to some surveys, 90 percent of businesses around the world are family-operated businesses. Much research suggests that in the U.S., family-run businesses outperform non-family-run businesses, especially while the founder is still alive.

Politics, too, has always been a dynastic affair. If Hillary Clinton wins the presidency, then 10 of the 45 presidents will have had a family member precede or follow them in the White House. According to my colleagues at *The Times*, among boomers, the son of a senator was 8,500 times more likely to become a senator than the average American male.

Things look the same on the state level. In New York there are Cuomos. In California, Browns. Out

West the joke is that voters should just vote for the closest Udall.

If you look around the globe, these pseudo-monarchical tendencies seem to be on the increase, not on the decrease. There are Aquinos in the Philippines, Nehru-Gandhis in India, even Le Pens in France. Now that women are more empowered, each dominant clan has essentially doubled the size of its talent pool, so family influence is increased.

Why do the members of dynastic families do so well? Some of the reasons are obvious and unfair: brand names and fundraising networks. Jeb Bush and Hillary Clinton get the benefit of their family members' fame. Their donor networks are already in place. These advantages will not necessarily make them better presidents.

But in other ways we should be grateful that in each field of endeavor there are certain families that are breeding grounds for achievement. We should be grateful that there are Bachs in music, Griffey and Molinas in baseball, Brontes and Amises in novel writing and Kennedys, Roosevelts, Clintons and Bushes in politics. These families make life more unfair for the rest of us (because it's harder for others to compete against them), but they also make society as a whole more accomplished.

Powerhouse families nurture achievement in many ways. First, there's identity formation. If you grow up in a musical family you're more likely to think of yourself as a musician at a young age. You can get your 10,000 hours of practice in early, which is a huge leg up.

Second, there is the realm of



David Brooks

practical knowledge. Very little of the knowledge you need to succeed in a trade can be taught in the classroom or read about in a book. It can only be imparted by example. If you're a Nancy Kassebaum and you grow up around your dad, Alf Landon, as he conducts a meeting, works a room or reacts to victory or defeat, you're more likely to have an intuitive feel for how the craft of politics is done.

Third, there is the level of skills. The philosopher Michael Oakeshott once observed that it takes three generations to make a career. That is, the skills that go into, say, a teacher — verbal fluency, empathy, endurance — take a long time to develop. They emerge in grandparents and great-grandparents and are passed down magnified through the generations. I bet you can trace ways your grandparents helped shape your career.

Fourth, there is audacity. It is very odd to think you should be president of the United States. But if you grow up in the Kennedy or Bush families it is apparently less odd.

Fifth, there is the time horizon. There are many reasons family businesses do better, for a time, than nonfamily businesses. The senior people are connected by intense and sometimes altruistic bonds of trust. But one reason is that families often run the business for the long term, to pass it down as a legacy to those not yet born.

Sunday was Mother's Day, when we celebrated the powerful ways mothers shape their children. Families are unequal. Some mothers — and some fathers, husbands and wives — shape their kin with extraordinary power, and in certain directions. We should fight unfair advantages like legacy admissions, but we wouldn't want to live in a society in which family influence didn't happen.

Individuals don't come fully formed. They emerge out of families and groups.

Free Willy! And other creatures, too

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER
Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — We often wonder how people of the past, including the most revered and refined, could have universally engaged in conduct now considered unconscionable. Such as slavery.

How could the Founders, so sublimely devoted to human liberty, have lived with — some participating in — human slavery?

Or fourscore years later, how could the saintly Lincoln, an implacable opponent of slavery, have nevertheless spoken of and believed in African inferiority?

While retrospective judgment tends to make us feel superior to our ancestors, it should really evoke humility. Surely some contemporary practices will be deemed equally abominable by succeeding generations. The only question is: Which ones?

I've long thought it will be our treatment of animals. I'm convinced that our great-grandchildren will find it difficult to believe that we actually raised, herded and slaughtered them on an industrial scale — for the eating.

To be sure, there has been a salutary turn in our attitude toward animals, especially their display and confinement. To its credit, Barnum & Bailey is retiring its elephant acts. Festooning these magnificent creatures with comically gaudy costumes and parading them about, often shackled, is a reproach to both their nobility and our humanity.

Or consider those SeaWorld com-

mercials reassuring us how well their orcas are treated. The tone is contrite and almost apologetic, as befits a business that trains splendid creatures to jump high on command for fish — and for our amusement.

And although some of these measures are market-driven — SeaWorld has been hemorrhaging customers and Cirque du Soleil has been thriving without animals — they are nonetheless welcome. As are the improvements in zoos. The zoo animals I remember from my childhood were so sadly caged, so restlessly pawing the ground, so piteously defeated. Today, the enclosures are more forgiving, the bars largely gone, the running space more ample.

It's understandable. The zoo used to symbolize man's dominion over his menacing adversaries, his competitors for living space. Tigers still roamed, and could eat you. Now the competition is over. Our rivals have either been wiped out or driven back to the bush. Except for the occasional shark dining on some in-trepid surfer, the threat is gone — and with it, the thrill of conquest.

No need, therefore, to display wildlife bound and tamed, King Kong-like. The overriding mission of today's zoo is conservancy — the care, study, preservation and propagation of the various species, some of them endangered.

Another advance, and not just for them but for us. One measure of human moral progress — amid and despite the savageries we visit upon each other — is how we treat the innocent in our care. And none are more innocent than these.



Charles Krauthammer

Which brings us to meat-eating. Its extinction will, I believe, ultimately come. And be largely market-driven, as well. Science will find dietary substitutes that can be produced at infinitely less cost and effort. At which point, meat will become a kind of exotic indulgence, what the cigar (of *Cigar Aficionado*) is to the dying tobacco culture of today.

As a moderate carnivore myself, I confess to living in Jeffersonian hypocrisy. It's a bit late for me to live on berries and veggies. My concession to my qualms is a few idiosyncratic distinctions (of no particular import). And while I don't demand that every chicken I consume be certified to have enjoyed an open meadow and a vibrant social life, if I can eat free range, I will.

No, I'm not joining PETA. Indeed, I firmly believe that man is the measure of all things. Sometimes you have to choose. I cringe at medical experimentation, but if you need to study cats' eyes in order to spare some humans from blindness, do it. (Though not to test cosmetics.)

If the Delta smelt has to die to conserve 1.4 trillion gallons of water for the parched humans of California, so be it. If the mating habits of the Arctic caribou have to be disturbed so we can produce 1 million barrels of oil a day — on a drilling footprint the size of Dulles Airport in a refuge the size of Ireland — I say: Apologize to the amorous herd, then drill.

But some things are unnecessary. Caging beautiful creatures. Displaying them for spectacle. It's good that these are being rethought.

The cheeseburger question we leave to our progeny. Though, when their time comes, they should refrain from moral preening. They will, by then, have invented abominations of their very own. Humans always do.

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