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Medicare's decision is a game changer

End of life conversations are difficult. But every family has them.

Sometimes they occur when people are in their prime — as part of a planning process. Sometimes they occur in more hurried circumstances — in a hospital emergency room or intensive care unit.

For physicians and hospitals there is enormous benefit in knowing what a patient's desire is. For a patient, there is security in knowing that family, as well as health care providers know their desires.

During debate of the Affordable Care Act, Sarah Palin derailed serious discussion of paying for end of life discussions by labeling them "death panels."

Last week, things changed dramatically when Medicare announced plans "to reimburse doctors for conversations with patients about whether and how they would want to be kept alive if they became too sick to speak for themselves."

Pam Belluck of *The New York Times* reported that, "Last September, a national nonpartisan panel of medical, legal and religious leaders issued a far-reaching report saying that the country's system for dealing with end-of-life care was seriously flawed and should be overhauled."

While a broad range of medical organizations applaud Medicare's decision, National Right to Life opposes it, fearing that people will be pressured into not receiving treatment.

In Right to Life's opposition and Sarah Palin's "death panel" smear there is an oversimplification of what

patients and physicians discuss. It is also curious to see Republican-based politicians and organizations opposing end of life planning.

When Oregon voters considered the Death With Dignity initiative, we made the point that giving people control over their final days was a very Republican idea, stemming from what was once a cardinal GOP tenet of personal freedom: that people should be free to control their lives.

In its obsession with treatment at the end of life, Right to Life is just as dictatorial as the federal government of Republicans' worst fears.

Oregon's Death With Dignity statute prompted much more attention to palliative care of terminally ill patients. Palliative care is not about medical heroics. It is about bringing comfort to patients in pain. Medicare's announcement will open a new door.

It is incorrect to write about end-of-life situations as though they were identical. Katy Butler made that point Sunday in *The New York Times*. "Many of us will face quandaries far too nuanced to be solved by aid-in-dying laws," wrote Butler "My parents certainly did."

We are on the brink of major change. Butler observed the significance of Medicare's funding decision is that "a once hidden conversation about medical autonomy and the downsides of life-support technologies is exploding into the wider culture."

That is a very healthy outcome.

Be careful what you wish for

Our region's curiously warm and dry spring and early summer are proving to be a case study in "Be careful what you wish for." Warm water and low stream flows are creating serious problems for salmon.

The latest edition of *Columbia Basin Bulletin* is a litany of worrisome news about impacted rivers and harmful effects on fish. So while coastal residents of the Pacific Northwest rejoice in experiencing a genuine summer — unlike the extended drizzly mid-year months that plague us some years — the news is not all good.

Here are some of the *Bulletin's* troubling stories:

- "The water temperature at the Willamette Falls counting station hit 80 degrees Fahrenheit ... July 3, and continue(d) to hover around 81 degrees (last) week. As a result, hundreds of salmon and steelhead have succumbed to a bacteria exacerbated by warmer than normal water in the Willamette River, as well as in other Northwest rivers."

- "Salmon and river managers of the regional Technical Management Team briefly lost their battle to keep Snake River temperatures in the Lower Granite Dam tailrace below 68 degrees Fahrenheit (last) week as low water, higher river temperatures from upstream and warmer than normal weather continues to plague the Northwest."

- "Dead and distressed sockeye salmon found this past weekend (July 4-5) in the Deschutes River appear to have been fish from the Columbia River bound for other upriver locations that likely swam into the Deschutes in search of cooler water. Early pathology results suggest the sockeye salmon died from columnaris, a bacterial infection typically associated with high water temperatures and/or low levels of dissolved oxygen."

- "Rivers and streams throughout the Columbia Basin, to varying degrees, are now flowing at levels normally seen in late summer. 'Everything pretty much south of the Canadian border is looking pretty pathetic, actually,'" a senior federal hydrologist said.

All this is happening in the context of salmon returns that remain very strong, at least on the Columbia. A drive across the Astoria Bridge reveals scores of fishing boats partaking in the largest summer Chinook run since 1961, along with a forecast 480,000 sockeye. These boats and salmon represent a large component of our economy.

But we should be prepared for delayed impacts on salmon from current conditions. Three years from now, we may be looking at fishing seasons more like those of a decade or two ago, when some spoke of the end of commercial and recreational harvests. Even this year, state fisheries managers have discussed but so far resisted imposing fishing restrictions in the afternoons on some rivers, when warming water begins to stress fish.

These conditions are, for now, an anomaly that are expected to run their course, but perhaps not until after ongoing El Niño conditions run their course in a year or so. But what we are experiencing now is a strong foretaste of what it will be like more or less every year by mid-century.

What can we do? Increasingly, we'll need to find ways to mitigate temperatures in rivers and reservoirs, maintaining shade and in-stream flows. As snow packs become a less reliable method of natural water storage, we will need to contemplate trying to hold back more winter rainfall for use in the summer and autumn. As the climate we know comes to an end, only fast adaptive action stands much chance of preserving vestiges of familiar life.

The GOP's laziness dogma

By PAUL KRUGMAN
New York Times News Service

Americans work longer hours than their counterparts in just about every other wealthy country; we are known, among those who study such things, as the "no-vacation nation."

According to a 2009 study, full-time U.S. workers put in almost 30 percent more hours over the course of a year than their German counterparts, largely because they had only half as many weeks of paid leave.

Not surprisingly, work-life balance is a big problem for many people.

But Jeb Bush — who is still attempting to justify his ludicrous claim that he can double our rate of economic growth — says that Americans "need to work longer hours and through their productivity gain more income for their families."

Bush's aides have tried to spin away his remark, claiming that he was only referring to workers trying to find full-time jobs who remain stuck in part-time employment. It's obvious from the context, however, that this wasn't what he was talking about. The real source of his remark was the "nation of takers" dogma that has taken over conservative circles in recent years — the insistence that a large number of Americans, white as well as black, are choosing not to work, because they can live lives of leisure thanks to government programs.

You see this laziness dogma everywhere on the right. It was the hidden background to Mitt Romney's infamous 47 percent remark. It underlay the furious attacks on unemployment benefits at a time of mass unemployment and on food stamps

when they provided a vital lifeline for tens of millions of Americans. It drives claims that many, if not most, workers receiving disability payments are malingerers — "Over half of the people on disability are either anxious or their back hurts," says Sen. Rand Paul.

It all adds up to a vision of the world in which the biggest problem facing America is that we're too nice to fellow citizens facing hardship. And the appeal of this vision to conservatives is obvious: It gives them another reason to do what they want to do anyway, namely slash aid to the less fortunate while cutting taxes on the rich.

Given how attractive the right finds the image of laziness run wild, you wouldn't expect contrary evidence to make much, if any, dent in the dogma. Federal spending on "income security" — food stamps, unemployment benefits, and pretty much everything else you might call "welfare" except Medicaid — has shown no upward trend as a share of GDP; it surged during the Great Recession and aftermath but quickly dropped back to historical levels. Paul's numbers are all wrong, and more broadly disability claims have risen no more than you would expect, given the aging of the population. But no matter, an epidemic of laziness is their story and they're sticking with it.

Where does Jeb Bush fit into this story? Well before his "longer hours" gaffe, he had professed himself a great admirer of the work of Charles Murray, a conservative social analyst most famous for his 1994 book *The Bell Curve*, which claimed that blacks are genetically inferior to whites. What Bush seems to ad-



Paul Krugman

mire most, however, is a more recent book, *Coming Apart*, which notes that over the past few decades working-class white families have been changing in much the same way that African-American families changed in the 1950s and 1960s, with declining rates of marriage and labor force participation.

Some of us look at these changes and see them as consequences of an economy that no longer offers good jobs to ordinary workers. This happened to African-Americans first, as blue-collar jobs disappeared from inner cities, but has now become a much wider phenomenon thanks to soaring income inequality. Murray, however, sees the changes as the consequence of a mysterious decline in traditional values, enabled by government programs which mean that men no longer "need to work to survive." And Bush presumably shares that view.

The point is that Bush's clumsy call for longer work hours wasn't a mere verbal stumble. It was, instead, an indication that he stands firmly on the right side of the great divide over what working American families need.

There's now an effective consensus among Democrats — on display in Hillary Clinton's Monday speech on the economy — that workers need more help, in the form of guaranteed health insurance, higher minimum wages, enhanced bargaining power, and more. Republicans, however, believe that American workers just aren't trying hard enough to improve their situation, and that the way to change that is to strip away the safety net while cutting taxes on wealthy "job creators."

And while Jeb Bush may sometimes sound like a moderate, he's very much in line with the party consensus. If he makes it to the White House, the laziness dogma will rule public policy.

An epidemic of laziness is their story and they're sticking with it.

A bias more than skin deep

By CHARLES M. BLOW
New York Times News Service

I will never forget the October 2013 feature on *National Geographic's* website:

There was a pair of portraits of olive-skinned, ruby-lipped boys, one with a mane of curly black hair, the other with the tendrils of blond curls falling into his face.

The portraits rested above the headline: "The Changing Face of America: We've become a country where race is no longer so black or white." It was about the explosion of interracial marriage in America and how it is likely to impact both our concept of race and the physical appearances of Americans.

As the Pew Research Center pointed out in a 2012 report: "About 15 percent of all new marriages in the United States in 2010 were between spouses of a different race or ethnicity from one another, more than double the share in 1980 (6.7 percent)."

People often think of the browning of America as a factor of immigration or racial/ethnic variances in birth rates, but it must also be considered this way: as a function of interracial coupling and racial identifications.

This freedom and fluidity is, on one level, a beautiful sign of societal progress toward less racial rigidity. But, at the same time, I am left with a nagging question: Does this browning represent an overcoming, on some level, of anti-black racism, or a socio-evolutionary sidestepping of it?

As some make choices that challenge the rigid racial caste system in this country — one strictly drawn and enforced, at least in part, to regulate the parameters of freedom and enslavement — is everyone elevated in the process, or are those on the darkest end of the spectrum still sub-

ject to a discrimination that is skin-shallow and bone-deep?

How does blackness itself, the obsidian, ethereal blackness of the people who populated my world as a child, fit this shifting paradigm? Is the laughable "postracial" really some strange proxy for "post-black," as Anna Holmes posited recently in *The New York Times Magazine*?

Biracial people can have their own challenges adapting to a world that adheres to the illusion of racial purity, in part because their very existence challenges the notion and reveals its ridiculousness.

That must be acknowledged. But what must also be acknowledged is that racial purity itself was an instrument developed for the protection of whiteness from "dilution," and the furthest one could move from whiteness was blackness.

Blackness was denigrated in direct proportion to the degree that whiteness was preferred or valued as supreme. And on top of this issue of race as defined by color, there is an overlay of gender. In particular, how do women with darker skin fit this paradigm in a culture and world that seem to reflexively conflate lighter-skinned not only with beauty but often with femininity itself?

I was reminded of this this month when *The Washington Post* reported on a study about the popularity of mul-tiracial people among online daters.

But even in this openness, there persisted a pro-white/anti-black bias. As *The Post* pointed out: "Hispanic women preferred men who identified as Hispanic-white above all else. Hispanic men were less selective —



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they liked Hispanic women, white women and Hispanic-white women about the same. White women responded to white men and Asian-white men the most, followed by Hispanic-white men and black-white men."

Furthermore, among all groups, according to the study's co-author, "Men didn't play racial favorites as much as women did. Except when it comes to black women, who were responded to the least."

While America's history in skin-color politics is long and deep, this aversion to darkness — particularly dark femininity — and aspiration to lightness, or even whiteness, isn't only an American phenomenon. It's a global sickness informed by history and culture and influenced by colonialism and the export of popular culture.

In 2012, *The New York Times* ran an article about Chinese women wearing ski masks to the beach to keep from getting darker.

The Guardian reported in 2013 on "India's obsession with fair skin" that incorporates the use of whitening cleansers that even include "vaginal washes." As the paper put it: "Last year, Indians reportedly consumed 233 tons of skin-whitening products, spending more money on them than on Coca-Cola."

And the BBC reported in 2013 that "a recent study by the University of Cape Town suggests that 1 woman in 3 in South Africa bleaches her skin"

It seems to me that we as a society — nationally and globally — must find some peace with dark skin itself, to not impute value and character onto color if harmony is truly to be had.

Until that is done, it often feels that we of darker bodies must resist the absorption of oppression and love ourselves defensively, as an equalizer. We must love our dark flesh as an antidote to a world that often disdains it.

Where to write

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