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Schnitzer largess provides future

Schnitzer is a famous name in philanthropic circles, supporting Portland's concert hall and other noteworthy causes in our area.

Part of a recent gift by Arlene Schnitzer Foundation of $1 million will help maintain the Confluence Project, the multi-state historic/art installation anchored in Ilwaco, Wash.'s, Cape Disappointment State Park.

Maya Lin, one of world's most famous designers, envisioned Confluence as a sort of living memorial to the melding of Native American and newly arriving cultures during the era of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

"At this site, Lewis and Clark found what they were looking for: the point where the Columbia River meets the majestic Pacific Ocean," according to Confluence's website. "Their journey's endpoint is where the Confluence Project's work began, with an installation that draws together the site's bay side and ocean side, interweaving the stories of the Corps of Discovery expedition and the Chinook people in a single, steadily unfolding experience."

It is often the case that ideas for art installations and other public spaces are born in a rush of enthusiasm, but then become degraded by passage of time and lack of funds for the far less glamorous work of maintenance and preservation. Finding money for such ongoing efforts is one of the Holy Grails of philanthropic work. It is the success that turns a bright idea into long-lasting heritage.

Enter Schnitzer, whose gift in honor of her son Jordan and Confluence supporter Thomas Lauderdale will help support not just the decade-old Maya Lin works at Cape D, but also five others elsewhere in Washington and Oregon. Besides kick-starting an endowment fund to care the projects, the Schnitzer money will be pivotal to 2017 completion of the potently symbolic final element of the Confluence Project adjacent to Celilo Falls — a key Indian landmark now submerged behind The Dalles Dam.

Initially a mixed source of pride and consternation for people who live in the vicinity, the Cape D installation has matured and grown in acceptance. Thanks to earlier fundraising efforts, a 12-ton block of polished and carved basalt serving as a fish-cleaning station on the Baker Bay shore has been re-etched this month, the words of the Chinook creation story now likely to withstand at least another couple decades of harsh storms and salmon guts. A trail makes an evocative connection between the river and ocean. Five cedar driftwood columns surrounding a cedar tree trunk that existed before Lewis and Clark arrived are reminiscent of European "wood henge" structures, traces of which have been found thousands of years after their construction.

No shoreline is ever permanent — now less so than ever. But it is good to see sound stewardship of an important artwork, even in this time of imminent change.

How much local control is too much?

The Oregon Secretary of State's Office has dealt a serious blow to an effort to put a ballot initiative designed to overturn laws pre-empting local control of matters regulated by the state.

Though backers of the "Right to Local, Community Self-Government" initiative are considering their options, we hope this puts an end to this nonsense.

Initiative backers hoped to be able to turn back state prohibitions on local governments banning genetically modified organisms and local regulation of pesticides. They also would like local jurisdictions to be able to regulate fracking, oil and gas development and coal exports.

In part, backers seek to allow local jurisdictions "to enact local laws that protect health, safety, and welfare by: establishing the fundamental rights of natural, their communities, and nature; securing those rights using prohibitions and other means; and establishing, defining, altering, or eliminating the rights, powers, privileges, immunities, or duties of corporations and other business entities operating or seeking to operate in the community, to prevent such rights, powers, privileges, immunities, or duties from interfering with such locally-enacted fundamental rights of natural persons, their communities, and nature."

Backers collected more than 1,000 signatures on their petitions, which gave them standing to receive a review for a ballot title — an important step in getting the measure on the 2016 ballot.

But the Secretary of State's Office rejected the initiative. It says the measure is too broad. Mary Geddry, a chief petitioner for the initiative, said that proponents haven't yet decided on a course of action but disagree with the Secretary of State's conclusions. She says her group isn't going to roll over.

"We're talking about fundamental rights," she said. "Communities don't have the right to say 'no' under the current system."

She's right, they don't. But we suspect that she's talking about things liberals don't like. In addition to banning GMOs and pesticide use, we're sure certain "progressive" communities would write their own minimum wage laws, gun regulations and environmental rules. And if they decide they don't like dry cleaners or meat packers, who knows.

But once passed, the measure would be sauce for the goose.

Officials in the more rural and largely conservative counties of Eastern Oregon might well decide that Oregon's protections on wolves don't apply, or gun regulations they believe make people less safe and trample on personal freedoms, or state land-use restrictions that violate personal property rights.

During the 1990s, there was a proposal to give county commissions the authority to regulate cougar hunting. This was tantamount to creating 36 wildlife management organizations across Oregon. The plan died.

In theory, it's hard to argue against "local" control. The notion has great democratic appeal. But in reality, turning each of Oregon's 36 counties and 242 incorporated cities into an independent duchy would set up a patchwork of regulation that would make everyone's business difficult, if not impossible.

The high price of fetal parts

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER
Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — Planned Parenthood's reaction to the release of a clandestinely recorded conversation about the sale of fetal body parts was highly revealing. After protesting that it did nothing illegal, it apologized for the "tone" of one of its senior directors.

Her remarks lacked compassion, admitted Planned Parenthood President Cecile Richards. As if Dr. Deborah Nucatola's cold and casual discussion over salad and wine of how the fetal body can be crushed with forceps in a way that leaves valuable organs intact for sale is some kind of personal idiosyncrasy. On the contrary, it's precisely the kind of psychic numbing that occurs when dealing daily with industrial scale destruction of the growing, thriving, recognizably human fetus.

This was again demonstrated by the release this week of a second video showing another official sporting that same tone, casual and even jocular, while haggling over the price of an embryonic liver. "If it's still low, then we can bump it up," she joked, "I want a Lamborghini."

Abortion critics have long warned that the problem is not only the obvious — what abortion does to the fetus — but also what it does to us. It's the same kind of desensitization that has occurred in the Netherlands with another mass exercise in life termination: assisted suicide. It began as a way to prevent the suffering of the terminally ill. It has now become so widespread and wanton that one-fifth of all Dutch assisted-suicide patients are euthanized without their explicit consent.

'Thank you Planned Parenthood. God bless you.'

— Barack Obama
address to Planned Parenthood, April 26, 2013

Charles Krauthammer

The Planned Parenthood revelations will have an effect. Perhaps not on government funding, given the Democratic Party's unwavering support and the president wishing it divine guidance. Planned Parenthood might escape legal jeopardy as well, given the loophole in the law banning the sale of fetal parts that permits compensation for expenses (shipping and handling, as it were).

But these revelations will have an effect on public perceptions. Just as ultrasound altered feelings about abortion by showing the image, the movement, the vibrant living-ness of the developing infant in utero, so too, I suspect, will these Planned Parenthood revelations, by throwing open the door to the backroom of the clinic where that being is destroyed.

It's an ugly scene. The issue is less the sale of body parts than how they are obtained. The nightmare for abortion advocates is a spreading consciousness of how exactly a healthy fetus is turned into a mass of marketable organs, how, in the words of a senior Planned Parenthood official, one might use "a less crunchy technique" — crush the head, spare the organs — "to get more whole specimens."

The effect on the public is a two-step change in sensibilities. First, when ultrasound reveals how human the living fetus appears. Next, when people learn, as in these inadvertent admissions, what killing the fetus involves.

Remember. The advent of ultrasound has coincided with a remarkable phenomenon: Of all the major social issues, abortion is the only one that has not moved toward increasing liberalization. While the legalization of drugs, the redefinition of marriage and other assertions of individual autonomy have advanced, some with astonishing rapidity, abortion attitudes have remained largely static. The country remains evenly split.

What will be the reaction to these Planned Parenthood revelations? Right now, to try to deprive it of taxpayer money. Citizens repelled by its activities should not be made complicit in them. But why not shift the focus from the facilitator to the procedure itself?

The House has already passed a bill banning abortion after 20 weeks. That's far more fruitful than trying to ban it entirely because, apart from the obvious constitutional issue, there is no national consensus about the moral status of the early embryo. There's more agreement on the moral status of the later-term fetus. Indeed, about two-thirds of Americans would ban abortion after the first trimester.

There is more division about the first trimester because one's views of the early embryo are largely a matter of belief, often religious belief. One's view of the later-term fetus, however, is more a matter of what might be called sympathetic identification — seeing the image of a recognizable human infant and, now, hearing from the experts exactly what it takes to "terminate" its existence.

The role of democratic politics is to turn such moral sensibilities into law. This is a moment to press relentlessly for a national ban on late-term abortions.

The minimum-wage muddle

By DAVID BROOKS
New York Times News Service

Once upon a time there was a near consensus among economists that raising the minimum wage was a bad idea.

The market is really good at setting prices on things, whether it is apples or labor. If you raise the price on a worker, employers will hire fewer and you'll end up hurting the people you meant to help.

David Brooks

Then, in 1993, economists David Card and Alan Krueger looked at fast-food restaurants in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and found that raising the minimum wage gave people more income without hurting employment. A series of studies in Britain buttressed these findings.

Today, raising the minimum wage is the central piece of the progressive economic agenda. President Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton champion it. Cities and states across the country have been moving to raise minimum wages to as high as $15 an hour — including New York state just this week.

Some of my Democratic friends are arguing that forcing businesses to raise their minimum wage will not only help low-wage workers; it will actually boost profits, because companies will better retain workers. Some economists have reported that there is no longer any evidence that raising wages will cost jobs.

Unfortunately, that last claim is inaccurate. There are in fact many studies on each side of the issue. David Neumark of the University of California, Irvine, and William Wascher of the Federal Reserve have done their own studies and point to dozens of others showing significant job losses.

Recently, Michael Wither and Jeffrey Clemens of the University of California, San Diego, looked at data from the 2007 federal minimum-wage hike and found that it reduced the national employment-to-population ratio by 0.7 percentage points (which is actually a lot), and led to a 6-percentage-point decrease in the likelihood that a low-wage worker would have a job.

Because low-wage workers get less work experience under a higher minimum-wage regime, they are less likely to transition to higher-wage jobs down the road.

Mary Altaffer /AP

Harley Perez, of Manhattan, who makes $8.75 and hour working at a McDonald's, smiles during a rally after the New York Wage Board endorsed a proposal to set a $15 minimum wage for workers at fast-food restaurants with 30 or more locations, Wednesday in New York. The increase would be phased in over three years in New York City and over six years elsewhere.

Wither and Clemens found that two years later, workers' chances of making $1,500 a month was reduced by 5 percentage points.

Many economists have pointed out that as a poverty-fighting measure the minimum wage is horribly targeted. A 2010 study by Joseph Sabia and Richard Burkhauser found that only 11.3 percent of workers who would benefit from raising the wage to $9.50 an hour would come from poor households. An earlier study by Sabia found that single mothers' employment dropped 6 percent for every 10 percent increase in the minimum wage.

Economists have their biases and reality is too granular.

A study by Thomas MaCurdy of Stanford built on the fact that there are as many individuals in high-income families making the minimum wage (teenagers) as in low-income families. MaCurdy found that the costs of raising the wage are passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices. Minimum-wage workers often work at places that disproportionately serve people down the income scale. So raising the minimum wage is like a regressive consumption tax paid for by the poor to subsidize the wages of workers who are often middle class.

What we have, in sum, is a very complicated situation. If we do raise the minimum wage a lot of people will clearly benefit and a lot of people will clearly be hurt. The most objective and broadest bits of evidence provoke ambivalence. One survey of economists by the University of Chicago found that 59 percent believed that a rise to $9 an hour would make it "noticeably harder" for poor people to find work. But a slight majority also thought the hike would be worthwhile for those in jobs. A study by the Congressional Budget Office found that a hike to $10.10 might lift 900,000 out of poverty but cost roughly 500,000 jobs.

My own guess is the economists will never be able to give us a dispositive answer about who is hurt or helped. Economists have their biases and reality is too granular. It depends on what region a worker is in, whether a particular job can be easily done by a machine, what the mindset of his or her employer is.

The best reasonable guess is that a gradual hike in high-cost cities like Seattle or New York will probably not produce massive dislocation. But raising the wage to $15 in rural New York will cause large disruptions and job losses.

The key intellectual upshot is that, despite what some people want you to believe, the laws of economic gravity have not been suspended. You can't impose costs on some without trade-offs for others. You can't intervene in the market without unintended consequences. And here's a haunting fact that seems to make sense: Raising the minimum wage will produce winners among job holders from all backgrounds, but it will disproportionately punish those with the lowest skills, who are least likely to be able to justify higher employment costs.