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Rep. Greg Walden
stuns the House

What if a politically secure
Republican spoke up for farmers
who need migrant labor?

In this editorial, we take the liberty of writing a speech for U.S. Rep Greg Walden, who represents Oregon’s sprawling 4th Congressional District of Eastern Oregon.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak for a group of Americans that we tend to forget in this chamber. These are farmers ... farmers who absolutely depend on migrant labor. There are many of these farmers in my district. And I am sure the same is true in many of your districts.

The *Capital Press*, a weekly agricultural newspaper published in my state of Oregon, reported on Sept. 18 that a California grower of organic figs lost \$500,000 — that is a half million dollars — in figs he was unable to harvest, because he had difficulty finding workers to harvest his crops. The figs rotted on the ground.

Not too long ago, I spent part of a day listening to orchardists in the Hood River Valley, which is part of my district. One of these growers — named Mike Omeg — described in painful detail what he has to do to make the federal H-2A temporary agricultural program work. Farmers use that program to bring guest workers to their land.

As Mr. Omeg and other Hood River orchardists told me, the H-2A program whipsaws them between the departments of Immigration — inside Homeland Security — Labor and State.

They also must comply with housing rules that are different than those enforced by the state of Oregon.

They must pay the prevailing wage. And if a worker does not perform, the farmer cannot dismiss him.

The farmers in the Hood River Valley are significant to one of Oregon’s regional economies, but most growers are smaller operations. Mr. Omeg told me that a large grower can make H-2A work, by gaining economies of scale. But those are not available to a small grower.

Mr. Speaker, we have talked about immigration reform for months and years. Some of the biggest names in both parties have broken their picks on this topic. Most recently, the Senate passed a bipartisan reform bill. But it has not come to a vote in this House.

It is no secret that farmers, across America, feel betrayed by the Republican party. That embarrasses me.

In taking the floor on this issue today, I realize that I may be jeopardizing my standing in the House majority leadership. But I must speak up for these farmers — just as I would for the bankers or nurses or beer distillers that make Oregon’s 1st Congressional District a great place to live.

If breaking my silence on this topic costs me my leadership position, so be it. The first obligation of each of us is to represent our constituents. That’s what I’m doing today.

Why ruin our river for
China’s rulers?

If there is a single environmental concern that unites most lower Columbia River residents, it is that some development might change our fundamental relationship with a basically healthy water body.

The river is a constant presence in our lives. It verges on being a member of our families. We have a sense of this being a place still firmly grounded within its natural surroundings — diametrically better from other American rivers that have been entirely given over to heavy industry.

Even the many of us who place a high priority on improving job prospects for ourselves or our children are likely to worry about proposed chemical plants upriver that could degrade water quality or increase the risk of a catastrophic accident.

Not just our sense of place, but heritage activities like commercial and recreational fishing, crabbing, clam digging, tourism and even Willapa, Washington, oystering would be at risk if chemical refining became entrenched on the Columbia.

Perhaps the worst-case scenario for environmental stewardship in the world today is China, which shows a predisposition to sacrifice anything in its effort to keep its economy growing, to keep the Communist rulers in power.

Few of us on the lower Columbia have yet realized that China is directly behind proposals in Clatskanie and in Kalama and Tacoma, Wash., to build large methanol-manufacturing plants to create the basic ingredient for export to China’s plastics

industry. (See www.tinyurl.com/ChinaMethanol)

Seattle-based *Sightline Daily* notes the potential methanol boom could pop as China’s economy continues to cool. But as population trends continue upward throughout Asia, it’s reasonable to surmise that manufacturing this highly adaptable compound — which can also be used as fuel — will remain a prospect here for years to come. On the U.S. Gulf Coast, a Shanghai-based energy company claims there is a “gold rush” atmosphere attached to meeting Chinese methanol demands.

Making methanol is a well-understood process, requiring vast amounts of energy and fresh water. Powering the refineries consumes a third of the natural gas that is piped into them, while each uses about 2,500 gallons of water per minute. According to *Sightline*, they “produce a stew of waste that includes heavy metals, volatile organic compounds, and various air pollutants.” Panamax-sized ships will be required to move the methanol between the Columbia River and Dalian, China.

In China, U.S. methanol is converted into olefins, which in turn are converted into plastics.

There is no doubt plastics are important — even if China is well known for selling them to us in the form of semi-disposable “dollar store” junk and inexpensive electronics. But we must weigh the cost and benefits carefully if Chinese plastics compromises the future of the Columbia River.

OPINION

The Pope and Clark Gable

By GAIL COLLINS
New York Times News Service

Watching the nation come to a screeching halt over Pope Francis’ visit, I had a flashback to my childhood in Cincinnati.

One day I saw a picture of then-Pope Pius XII on the front page of the evening paper and I was shocked — Shocked!

I had no idea that anybody in Ohio outside my immediate neighborhood knew who he was.

In our Catholic school, the nuns stressed our isolation, and they kept prepping us to be ready to die for our faith at any moment. Like St. Ursula, who was on a pilgrimage with 11,000 virgins, all of whom instantly chose martyrdom rather than surrender their purity to infidel Huns. (At the time, I just knew virgins were women who hadn’t married, and I had a vision of throngs of young ladies being pursued by barbarians waving engagement rings.)

Or St. Tarcisius, a Roman boy who was carrying holy communion to imprisoned Christians. There are many versions of this story, but in the one my teachers told, the job was supposed to be performed in total silence. When his pagan playmates asked him to join their game, Tarcisius clasped his sacred package to his heart and shook his head. Then the pagan boys guessed what was up and beat him to death.

I spent a lot of time trying to figure out how Tarcisius might have gotten away unscathed. Maybe by pretending to have a sore throat? It seemed important to identify the best strategy, because some modern-day version of the Huns or pagan Romans could arrive at any minute.

Catholicism was, as I learned after the Pius XII incident, the largest faith in my city. Many of our teachers were probably only a generation away from being picked-on immigrants, and maybe they brought their sense of paranoia with them to the classrooms. That’s understandable, but being both the powerful majority and the persecuted minority is like having your cake and eating it, and then taking over the bakery and bolting the front door.

This brings us back to Francis, a humble man who accepts that he’s very powerful. He may have a little car and a modest home, but when he looks out at the world, his gaze isn’t defensive. He wants Catholicism to thrive — on a planet without global warming.

He knows there are places where Catholics are suffering terribly for their faith, but when he looks at an embattled flock, he also sees Muslim immigrants who need Christian countries to open their borders.

Almost everybody appreciates this is a terrific gift to the world. Many people were hoping for a second one: some change in the church’s dogma on sex. This seems highly unlikely. But if Francis can at least change the context, that would be terrific.

Catholic schools don’t focus on sex now the way they did when I was a student. But the current crop of bishops was probably educated in schools like mine, where the subject came up 24/7. When Clark Gable died, one of my teachers explained that since the actor had had several wives, God knew he was going to hell and had probably given him earthly success to make up for any good deeds he performed in this world.

This was not official Catholic doctrine. The reform-minded John XXIII was pope by then and he would have fainted if confronted by the Clark Gable theory. But it was an excellent example of how loopy things can get if a religion obsesses on consensual private behavior.



Gail Collins



AP Photo
Carole Lombard and Clark Gable watching a lawn tennis match together on Nov. 13, 1936, in Los Angeles.

He wants Catholicism to thrive — on a planet without global warming.

I remember one priest who told us that when Christ was dying on the cross, he sadly envisioned us Catholic girls sinning in the back seat of a car.

“Aren’t there any other sins?” I asked one day. I’d be sort of proud of having come up with the question if the follow-up hadn’t been such a failure. I couldn’t think of any other immediate possibilities. Nobody in my school even swore.

“Like ...” I groped. “... Greed?” All I knew about greed was cartoons of Scrooge McDuck sitting on a pile of money.

There were obviously a lot of character failings we could have discussed. My friends and I were capable of floating for weeks without seriously directing attention at anything that didn’t involve ourselves. But as long as we kept away from boys’ wandering hands, we felt spiritually A-OK.

This pope is highly unlikely to accept gay marriage, and he’ll never give abortion a pass. But in Washington he grouped abortion in a long catalog of wrongs that need to be righted: hungry children, bombing, “immigrants who drown in the search for a better tomorrow,” old or sick people who are treated as a burden, terrorism, war, drug trafficking and environmental devastation.

It’s a long, long way from believing that God looked at Clark Gable’s soul and saw nothing but a guy who got divorced.

Double suicide: the 2015 campaign

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER
Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — Meanwhile, on the Democrats’ side:

- They are running a presidential campaign decrying wage stagnation, income inequality and widespread economic malaise — as if they’ve not been in office for the past seven years.

- Their leading presidential candidate is 27 points underwater on the question of honesty and is under FBI investigation for possible mishandling of classified information.
- Her chief challenger is a 74-year-old socialist with a near-spotless record of invisibility in 25 years in Congress. The other three candidates can hardly be found at all.
- The only plausible alternative challenger, Joe Biden, has run and failed twice and, before tragedy struck (to which he has responded, one must say, with admirable restraint and courage), was for years a running national joke for his endless gauche-ries and verbal pratfalls.

For the GOP, this has all been a godsend, an opportunity to amplify the case being made every day by the Democrats themselves against their own stewardship. Instead, the Republicans spent the summer attacking each other — the festival of ad hominem interrupted only by spectacular attempts to alienate major parts of the citizenry.

The latest example is Ben Carson, the mild-mannered, highly personable neurosurgeon and one of two highest-polling GOP candidates. He said on Sunday that a Muslim should not be president of the United States.

His reason is that Islam is incompatible with the Constitution. On the contrary. Carson is incompatible with a Constitution that explicitly commands that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.”

Ever. And it is no defense of Carson to say that he was not calling for legal disqualification of Muslims, just advocating that one should not vote for them. But that defense misses the point: The Constitution is not just a legal document. It is a didactic one. It doesn’t just set limits to power; it expresses a national ethos.

It doesn’t just tell you what you’re not allowed to do; it also suggests what you shouldn’t want to do. The First Amendment allows you to express whatever opinion you want — even, say, advocating the suppression of free speech in others. But a major purpose of the Constitution is to discourage and delegitimize such authoritarian thinking.

Carson later backtracked, saying that he meant opposing someone not because of his identity, ethnicity or faith but because of his ideology — meaning that he wouldn’t want in the White House an Islamist who seeks to impose Shariah law.

Neither would I. Unfortunately, that’s not what Carson had said. In the original interview, he said, “I would not advocate that we put a Muslim in charge of this nation.” It would not have been hard to attach any of the appropriate restrictive adjectives — radical, extreme, Islamist — to the word “Muslim.” He didn’t.

Indeed, Carson gave the correct answer minutes later when he



Charles Krauthammer

said he wouldn’t apply his presidential religious test to congressional candidates. In that case, “it depends on who that Muslim is and what their policies are.” Which is, of course, the right answer, the American answer, the only possible answer to the same question about a candidate for the presidency.

Carson is not one to cynically pander. Nor do I doubt that his statement about a Muslim president was sincerely felt. But it remains morally outrageous. And, in a general election, politically poisonous. It is certainly damaging to any party when one of its two front-runners denigrates, however thoughtlessly, the nation’s entire Muslim American community.

Particularly when it follows the yeoman work done by the other leading GOP candidate to alienate other large chunks of the citizenry. Three minutes into his campaign, Donald Trump called Mexican-American immigrants rapists who come bringing drugs and crime. He followed that by advocating the deportation of 11 million illegal immigrants. And sealed the deal by chastising Jeb Bush for speaking Spanish in answer to a question posed in Spanish.

Trump’s contretemps with women enjoy even more renown — his attacks on Megyn Kelly (including a retweet calling her a bimbo) and his insulting Carly Fiorina for her looks.

Muslims, Hispanics, women. What next? Who’s left?

It’s a crazy time. One party is knowingly lurching toward disaster, marching inexorably to the coronation of a weak and deeply wounded presidential candidate. Meanwhile, the other party is flamboyantly shooting at itself and gratuitously alienating one significant electoral constituency after another.

And it’s only September. Of 2015.

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