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Life looks different at Tongue Point Job Corps

The unrelenting ethic is about results.

Graduation at the Tongue Point Job Corps Center is an emotionally charged event. The day marks completion of a demanding program that’s aimed at equipping a group of young people for entry into the economy.

Seeing these young men and women walk to receive their diplomas is a reminder not to take one’s good fortune for granted. One of last week’s graduates was Gabriel Chavez, whose life story of setback after setback was described by Edward Stratton. Of his Job Corps experience, Chavez told Stratton: “I thought I would fail, because nothing good ever happened in my life.”

Imagine the challenge facing Tamar Baker, a refugee of the Haitian earthquake who came to Colville, Washington, speaking only French and Creole. Baker

learned English and graduated from high school with her contemporaries.

The unrelenting Job Corps ethic is about results. Students must master professional skills and attain social skills. The center itself is measured on outcomes. The Tongue Point Center ranks sixth out of 127 centers in the job placement of its graduates.

Job Corps is one of the best training programs the federal government has fostered. Fifty years on, the Tongue Point Job Corps Center delivers tangible results of which we can be proud.

Crab season brings environmental message

Closures are also a blow to the economy

There are parts of the world, even parts of the U.S., where eating crab is not for the weak of stomach. Thankfully, this definitely isn’t one of them.

A product of cold north Pacific water, our local Dungeness crab are predators that eat clams and other shellfish, as well as small fish and scavenged meat. Here at the mouth of the Columbia River, they particularly love razor clams — a preference they share with the many human fans of clams. Thanks to their diet, Dungeness crab have a sweet and mild flavor and aroma. Served up with bowls of melted butter, they are one of the West Coast’s favorite seafood treats.

All this goodness adds up to a reputation that is important to protect. So last week’s news that the Dungeness season’s start will be delayed beyond its traditional Dec. 1 start was greeted with somewhat less disappointment than might have been expected. John Corbin, a fisherman whose company has two Dungeness crab boats in Warrenton, was quoted, “This year they’re full enough, but we want to make sure the crab is good quality and safe for the public. When things are right, we will go at it.”

Delays in crab season, for other reasons, are not a surprise. Not infrequently, testing finds they have not yet become meaty enough to justify harvesting. The start date is pushed back — sometimes by a month. Boat owners factor this into their budgets, while crab frozen the year before typically addresses immediate consumer demand.

Delays are harder news for boat crews, who often rely on pre-Christmas paychecks for a good deal of holiday shopping and bill paying.

Crab money also circulates through our communities, helping keep many others employed.

Anti-Muslim is anti-American

By CHARLES BLOW
New York Times News Service

There seems to be no bottom to the cesspool of Islamophobic rhetoric coming from Republican candidates.

The tone of anti-Muslim musings post-Paris attack has become so poisonous that it cannot portend anything positive.

In the latest, the Republican front-runner said the United States would have “absolutely no choice” but to close some mosques. And, when asked by a reporter, he seemed to suggest he wouldn’t have a problem registering Muslims, which many have condemned, comparing it to the way Jews were once treated. (After heavy bipartisan criticism, he tried to walk back his remarks about the registry.)

And then Dr. Ben Carson drew a tortured parallel between Syrian refugees, who are mostly Muslim, and “a rabid dog running around your neighborhood.”

Robert McCaw, spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, told Al-Jazeera that Carson’s remarks were “unthinkable,” saying, “There is only one thing you do with a rabid dog — and that’s put it down.”

Indeed, this is the problem with reckless, racist rhetoric: Each utterance tosses one more log onto the bonfire that can burn out a space for the unimaginable.

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. warned in his 1967 “The Other America” speech: “Racism is evil because its ultimate logic is genocide.” As King put it:

“If one says that I am not good enough to live next door to him; if one says that I am not good enough to eat at a lunch counter, or to have a good, decent job, or to go to school with him

merely because of my race, he is saying consciously or unconsciously that I do not deserve to exist.”

Whereas these candidates may not be conscious of this “ultimate logic” or in any way approve of it, it doesn’t make their language any less dangerous when it lands on the ears of the minorities on the margins, or those looking for a reason to gussy up their wrongheadedness with righteousness.

A 2013 Carnegie Mellon University study “found that in the most Republican states in the country, employers may be less likely to interview job candidates whose social networking profiles indicate that the applicants are Muslim,” according to Pew.

As Pew explained: “In the 10 states with the highest proportion of Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney voters in the 2012 election, 17 percent of Christian applicants received interview calls, compared with 2 percent of the Muslim job candidates. There were no differences in callbacks received by the Christian and Muslim candidates in the 10 states with the lowest proportion of Romney voters.”

Late last month, Lawrence Downes reported on a poll in a red state with this caveat:

“It’s just one poll in one Southern state, North Carolina, by one polling outfit (Public Policy Polling, or PPP) with Democratic Party ties, asking questions of a few hundred Republican primary voters.”

“But still,” Downes continued, these were the results: 72 percent believed a Muslim should not be allowed to be president of the United States, and 40 percent believed that Islam should be illegal in this country.

It is no wonder, then, that a 2011 Pew Research Center Muslim Amer-

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ican survey found that just 11 percent of Muslims identify with or lean toward Republicans, while 70 percent do likewise for Democrats.

Furthermore, a 2013 paper co-published by the Center for American Progress and the New York University School of Law’s Brennan Center for Justice found:

“A troubling trend is quickly developing in state legislatures across the country: In a thinly concealed attempt to inflame anti-Muslim attitudes, lawmakers in 32 states have moved to ban foreign or international law. The bans are based on model legislation designed by anti-Muslim activist David Yerushalmi and promoted by activists who have stirred up fears that Islamic laws and customs — commonly referred to as ‘Sharia’ — are taking over American courts. Although proponents of these bans have failed to cite a single instance where a U.S. court has relied on Sharia to resolve a dispute, foreign law bans have been enacted in Oklahoma, Kansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Arizona, while a related ban on religious law has been enacted in South Dakota.”

As the ACLU has written of these laws:

“Efforts to single out Muslims and to advance the ugly idea that anything Islamic is un-American are unjust and discriminatory and should be rejected. Laws that single out Sharia violate the First Amendment by treating one belief system as suspect.”

This demonizing a single religious faith is a slippery slope. It feeds something that is at odds with the most noble ambition of this country’s better angels: equality.

The 2011 Pew survey found that among Muslim Americans: “Significant numbers report being looked at with suspicion (28 percent), and being called offensive names (22 percent). And while 21 percent report being singled out by airport security, 13 percent say they have been singled out by other law enforcement. Overall, a 52 percent majority says that government antiterrorism policies single out Muslims in the U.S. for increased surveillance and monitoring.”

We must put a lid on this corrosive language. Simply put, being specifically anti-Muslim is, in a way, anti-American.

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Healthcare reform lives!

By PAUL KRUGMAN
New York Times News Service

To the right’s dismay, scare tactics — remember death panels? — and spurious legal challenges failed to protect the nation from the scourge of guaranteed health coverage. Still, Obamacare’s opponents insisted that it would implode in a “death spiral” of low enrollment and rising costs.

But the law’s first two years of full implementation went remarkably well. The number of uninsured Americans dropped sharply, roughly in line with projections, while costs came in well below expectations. Opponents of reform could have reconsidered their position — but that hardly ever happens in modern politics. Instead, they doubled down on their forecasts of doom, and hyped every hint of bad news.

I mention all of this to give you some perspective on recent developments that mark a break in the string of positive surprises. Yes, Obamacare has hit a few rough patches lately. But they’re much less significant than a lot of the reporting, let alone the right-wing reaction, would have you believe. Health reform is still a huge success story.

Obamacare seeks to cover the uninsured through two channels. Lower-income Americans are covered via a federally-funded expansion of Medicaid, which was supposed to be nationwide but has been rejected in many Republican-controlled states. Everyone else has access to policies sold by private insurers who

cannot discriminate based on medical history; these policies are supposed to be made affordable by subsidies that depend on your income.

Nobody ever expected Obamacare to cover all the uninsured. In fact, Congressional Budget Office projections made in 2013 suggested that about 10 percent of nonelderly U.S. residents would remain uncovered: some because they are undocumented immigrants, some because of the gap created by red-state Medicaid rejection and some because they would fall through the cracks of a complicated system. But the law was nonetheless projected to produce a sharp reduction in the number of Americans without insurance, and it has, especially in states like California that have tried to make it work.

Meanwhile, both insurance premiums and the cost of subsidies designed to make them affordable came in far below expectations in both 2014 and 2015.

Sooner or later, of course, there were bound to be some negative surprises. And we’re now, finally, getting a bit of bad, or at least not-great, news about health reform.

First, premiums are going up for next year, because insurers are finding that their risk pool is somewhat sicker and hence more expensive than they expected. There’s a lot of variation across states, but the average increase will be around 11 percent. That’s a slight disappointment, but it’s not shocking, given both the good news of the previous two years and the long-term tendency of insurance premiums to rise 5-10 percent a year.

Paul Krugman

Second, some Americans who bought low-cost insurance plans have been unpleasantly surprised by high deductibles. This is a real issue, but it shouldn’t be exaggerated. All allowed plans cover preventive services without a deductible, and many plans cover other health services as well. Furthermore, additional financial aid is available to lower-income families to help cover such gaps. Some people may not know about these mitigating factors — that’s the problem with a fairly complex system — but awareness should improve over time.

Finally, UnitedHealth Group made a splash by announcing that it is losing money on the policies it sells on the Obamacare exchanges, and is considering withdrawing from the market after next year. There were some puzzling things about the announcement, leading to speculation about ulterior motives, but the main thing to realize is that UnitedHealth, while a huge provider of employment-based insurance, is actually a fairly small player in this market, and that other players are sounding much more positive.

Oh, and official projections now say that fewer people will enroll in those exchanges than previously predicted. But the main reason is that surprisingly few employers are dropping coverage; overall projections for the number of uninsured Americans still look pretty good.

So where does that leave us? Without question, the run of unexpectedly good news for Obamacare has come to an end, as all such runs must. And look, we’re talking about a brand-new system in which everyone is still learning how to function. There were bound to be some bobbles along the way.

But are we looking at the beginnings of a death spiral? Some people are indeed saying that, but as far as I can tell, they’re all people who have been predicting disaster every step of the way, and will still be predicting imminent collapse a decade from now.

The reality is that Obamacare is an imperfect system, but it’s workable — and it’s working.

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