

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## We must take care of ourselves

In countless ways, plastics remain one of the milestone industrial accomplishments of the post-World War II era. But along with other manmade chemicals, they come with downsides we are only now coming to realize.

This is the message of recent studies and cautionary articles, including one by Nicholas Kristof in today's *Daily Astorian*. Kristof's disturbing warnings come at the same time as news from the University of California-Davis that plastic fibers — as well as those from natural fabrics — are a nearly invisible but rampant form of water pollution.

Kristof's report summarizes warnings by the Endocrine Society and the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics. In both cases, concerns are most severe when it comes to chemical exposures for unborn babies, along with expecting mothers and their young children. But chemicals are an "equal-opportunity" pollutant, also causing adult cancers and disruptions of hormonal systems at all ages, resulting in soaring rates of diabetes and obesity.

Each year, toxic environmental chemicals result in millions of premature deaths and billions of dollars in damage, the IFGO continues. (See [www.tinyurl.com/IFGOstatement](http://www.tinyurl.com/IFGOstatement).)

The main trust of Kristof's story is that the health impacts

of chemicals are being minimized in the same way tobacco's were. He notes chemical lobbyists spent the equivalent of \$121,000 per member of Congress last year.

Meanwhile, plastic fibers from synthetic fleece in clothing are being found in appalling quantities in the environment — particularly the ocean. (See [www.tinyurl.com/FiberPollution](http://www.tinyurl.com/FiberPollution).) Along with plastic microbeads in products like cosmetics and toothpaste, the fibers work their way through the food chain. Human and animal health are harmed.

Living as we do at the intersection of the Pacific Ocean and an enormous watershed, we must be zealous advocates for our own children on these matters. Tell members of our congressional delegation this is an issue that will win or lose our votes for them. Refer to [www.ewg.org/consumer-guides](http://www.ewg.org/consumer-guides) for helpful advice about avoiding dangerous chemicals in food and products. Support efforts to minimize the toxic effects of big money in American politics.

We must take care of ourselves. Clearly, the chemical industry won't to it for us.

## Our goal should be reduce the uninsured

We say we live in an Information Age. Yet we are awash in misinformation. At times it seems there is an imitation of Gresham's Law (bad money drives out good). In 21st century America it seems like bad information drives out good.

Science is typically the best example of this phenomenon. Among the things America has unlearned or forgotten is public health. The great, widespread positive effects that vaccination created in the 20th century are being undone in the 21st.

When an electorate votes against its personal welfare, it is a head-scratcher. Prior to the November election, Kentucky, the only Southern state to fully embrace Obamacare, had the lowest level of uninsured citizens among those states. But Matt Bevin, the Republican who won the race for governor has vowed to roll back the expansion of Medicaid that his Democratic predecessor engineered.

The *New York Times* reported Friday that low-income Kentuckians are hurrying to health clinics before Bevin can take away their benefits.

One of the startling details that Abby Goodnough of the *Times* provides is that Bevin won the Kentucky counties with the highest percentage of citizens on Medicaid. Voter turnout statewide was 31 percent.

The Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, needs retooling. U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., is among those who are ready to put together adjustments. But in the Republican obsession with all things Obama, The GOP has backed itself and people, such as those who live in Kentucky, into a corner. Will the new governor, Mr. Bevin, say: "Now I must take away the access to health care you have under Medicaid."

It really is a good thing to diminish the number of uninsured Americans. Those gains can be seen in Oregon and other states that have embraced the Affordable Care Act.

*Editorials that appear on this page are written by Publisher Steve Forrester and Matt Winters, editor of the Chinook Observer and Coast River Business Journal, or staff members from the EO Media Group's sister newspapers.*

## GUEST COLUMN

# What do you associate with party labels?

By ADAM DAVIS  
*For Oregon Capital Insider*

What would you write if you were asked to record the first thing (no more than 10 words) that comes to mind when you hear the words "the media." Or the words "big business?" Or "teachers' unions?"

Think about it. Give yourself a couple of seconds with each one.

In the world of opinion research, this exercise is a form of qualitative research. It can be done through open-ended questions in surveys or written exercises in focus groups, and the results teach us not only how people feel about something, but also why they feel that way. The semantics and imagery "freely" associated with the name of an organization or individual are invaluable in formulating public relations and advertising.

What would we learn if Oregonians were asked to free associate with the Democratic and Republican parties? This is exactly what DHM Research explored in a recent statewide survey of registered voters. Party officials, campaign managers, and candidates should perhaps consider what we found — the good, the bad, and the downright ugly — as an early holiday gift to help with communications going into 2016.

Starting with the Democratic Party, representative associations recorded by over 600 Oregon voters included: "Least harmful," "Liberal leaning," "Raise minimum wage," "Freedom," "Spending money," "Progressive, concerned about people of all classes" and a little longer than 10 words, "Liberal, progressive, rational, compassionate, reasonable, compromising, team oriented, encompassing willing to grow and evolve."

Doing a word count, the Top 10 words associated with the Democratic Party were "liberal," "progressive," "social," "people,"

"spend," "party," "government," "tax," "support" and "environment." Democrats, that's your party's image among all voters, but what about by party registration? Are there differences in how Democrats see themselves compared to the perceptions of Republicans and nonaffiliated/others?

Let's break it down.

The top five words associated by Republicans with the Democratic Party were: "liberal," "tax," "spend," "social" and "government" compared to Democrats' "progressive," "liberal," "people," "party" and "environment." The Top 5 words among nonaffiliated/others — a group important to both parties in Oregon as traditional party registrations dwindle — were "liberal," "government," "big," "social" and "party."

**'Gun' was No.29 for Democrats and No. 12 for Republicans.**

As for the Republican Party, a randomly selected listing of associations among all voters yields: "Most harmful," "business for their friends," "pro-life," "big believers in low taxes for business," "mainly insane" and a couple of longer ones — "racism, for rich people, bigots, anti-gay, anti-immigrant, hypocritical, noncompromising, self-serving, religious, un-American" and finally one also with a political scientist bent to it, "trying to reflect more true and traditional Constitutional governance such as limited role of federal government, greater state's rights and person freedoms, but doing a terrible job of communicating that message."

Random selection! The Top 10 words associated with the party by all voters were: "conservative," "party," "right," "business," "government," "people," "religious," "rich," "selfish" and "big."

There you are Republicans. As for analysis by party registration, among Democrats the Top 5 words for the Republican Party were: "conservative," "party," "right," "people" and "business," compared to Republicans about themselves:



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"conservative," "government," "party," "fiscal" and "responsible." As for the nonaffiliated/others, the Top 5 associations were "conservative," "business," "right," "party" and "old." That "old," ouch.

Both parties might consider some image triage and recalibrating their communications to better

connect with members of their party and nonaffiliated/others. Both the Democratic and Republican parties are associated by Oregon voters with politics and government—not surprising since they're both political parties and part of governance, but unfortunate in that voters feel so negatively about these items. Other negative associations these days includes "spending" and "taxes" for the Democrats and "selfish," "rich" and "big" for Republicans.

The parties may want to consider doing more to be associated with what Oregon voters feel is important and/or feel positive about.

Education, for instance, is a top issue that Oregon voters want their government officials to do something about. For the Democrats, "education" was word No.63 and it wasn't even on the list for Republicans.

The environment is what Oregonians value most about living in the state, including clean air, clean water and natural beauty. Where's the association with the environment? For the Republicans, it was No. 36 and for Democrats No.10.

Some other tidbits. "Gun" was No.29 for Democrats and No. 12 for Republicans; "women" was No. 47 for Democratic Party and No. 42 for Republicans; and "money" was a near tie — No. 14 for the Democratic Party and No. 13 for Republicans.

There it is — a look in the mirror for you party officials, campaign managers and candidates. And hopefully food for thought for communications ... and an early holiday gift.

Adam Davis, who has been conducting opinion research in Oregon for more than 35 years, is a founding principal in DHM Research, an independent, nonpartisan firm. Visit [www.dhmresearch.com](http://www.dhmresearch.com)

## Polluting our bodies with toxic chemicals

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF  
*New York Times News Service*

In recent weeks, two major medical organizations have issued independent warnings about toxic chemicals in products all around us.

Unregulated substances, they say, are sometimes linked to breast and prostate cancer, genital deformities, obesity, diabetes and infertility.

"Widespread exposure to toxic environmental chemicals threatens healthy human reproduction," the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics warned in a landmark statement last month.

The warnings are a reminder that the chemical industry has inherited the mantle of Big Tobacco, minimizing science and resisting regulation in ways that cause devastating harm to unsuspecting citizens.

In the 1950s, researchers were finding that cigarettes caused cancer, but the political system lagged in responding. Now the same thing is happening with toxic chemicals.

The gynecology federation's focus is on endocrine disrupters, chemicals that imitate sex hormones and often confuse the body. Endocrine disrupters are found in pesticides, plastics, shampoos and cosmetics, cash register receipts, food can linings, flame retardants and countless other products.

"Exposure to toxic chemicals during pregnancy and lactation is ubiquitous," the organization cautioned, adding that virtually every pregnant woman in America has at least 43 different chemical contaminants in her body. It cited a National Cancer Institute report finding that "to a disturbing extent babies are born 'pre-polluted.'"

This warning now represents the medical mainstream. It was drafted by experts from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, the World Health Organization, Britain's Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and similar groups.

Such medical professionals are on the front lines. They are the ones confronting rising cases of hypospadias, a birth defect in which boys are born with a urethra opening on the side of the penis rather than at the tip. They are the ones treating women with breast cancer. Both are conditions linked to early exposure to endocrine disrupters.

**The chemical lobby spent the equivalent of \$121,000 per member of Congress last year.**

The other major organization that recently issued a warning is the Endocrine Society, the international association of doctors and scientists who deal with the hormone system.

"Emerging evidence ties endocrine-disrupting chemical exposure to two of the biggest public health threats facing society — diabetes and obesity," the Endocrine Society said in announcing its 150-page "scientific statement." It added that "mounting evidence" also ties endocrine disrupters to infertility, prostate cancer, undescended testicles, testicular cancer, breast cancer, uterine cancer, ovarian cancer and neurological issues. Sometimes these problems apparently arise in adults because of exposures decades earlier in fetal stages.

"The threat is particularly great when unborn children are exposed," the Endocrine Society warned.

Tracey J. Woodruff of the University of California, San Francisco notes, "One myth about chemicals is that the U.S. government makes sure they're



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safe before they go on the marketplace." In fact, most are assumed to be safe unless proved otherwise.

Of the 80,000 or more chemicals in global commerce today, only a tiny share have been rigorously screened for safety. Even when a substance is retired because of health concerns, the replacement chemical may be just as bad.

"It's frustrating to see the same story over and over," Woodruff said. "Animal studies, in vitro tests or early human studies show that chemical A causes adverse effects. The chemical industry says, 'Those are bad studies, show me the human evidence.' The human evidence takes years and requires that people get sick. We should not have to use the public as guinea pigs."

Europe is moving toward testing chemicals before they go on the market, but the United States is a laggard because of the power of the chemical lobby. Chemical safety legislation now before the Senate would require the Environmental Protection Agency to start a safety assessment of only 25 chemicals in the first five years — and House legislation isn't much better.

"There are almost endless parallels with the tobacco industry," says Andrea Gore, a professor of pharmacology at the University of Texas at Austin and editor of the journal *Endocrinology*.

For now, experts say the best approach is for people to try to protect themselves. Especially for women who are pregnant or may become pregnant, and for young children, try to eat organic, reduce the use of plastics, touch cash register receipts as little as possible, try to avoid flame-retardant couches and consult the consumer guides at [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org).

The chemical lobby spent the equivalent of \$121,000 per member of Congress last year, so expect chemical companies to enjoy strong quarterly profits, more boys to be born with hypospadias and more women to die unnecessarily of breast cancer.