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Congress does its job

But, ban on exporting oil has Pacific Northwest ramifications

Last Friday's congressional approval of \$1.15 trillion in spending and \$620 billion in tax savings for businesses and low-income workers includes at least one deal that deserves vigorous opposition in the Pacific Northwest, even as we mildly celebrate lawmakers managing to finish once-routine business.

With little if any input from ordinary citizens, Congress eliminated a 40-year-old ban on exporting American oil. This action stands to have an oversized impact on the Pacific Northwest, which is the beachhead between the Bakken oil field and energy-hungry Asian nations. Backroom deal-making means we will bear consequences in the form of oil-spill risks; increased traffic congestion and other impacts from long oil trains; and conflicts between oil tankers and other users of the Columbia, Puget Sound and Pacific Ocean.

There also may be benefits in the form of jobs and tax revenue. As a general matter, restraints on trade — including the oil-export ban — tend to be an economic drag.

But the overarching problem with rescinding the export ban and with other aspects of the spending/tax-break deal is that they are the product of a few federal legislators and staff members working in concert with lobbyists. A majority in Congress won't know what is in the 2,242-page bill until details are deciphered in coming days.

Legislating is about compromise — a fact of life often forgotten in the modern Congress. But lawmakers should interact with citizens concerning decisions like ending the export ban that have

Restricted voting defies the demographic wave

Racism is not a healthy credo for a nation

Barack Obama's election to the presidency stirred many Republican responses. Of all of them, the drive to restrict minority voting is among the most short-sighted and debilitating.

Instead of competing for Hispanic votes and responding to workplace needs for immigration reform, Republican leaders are motivated by fear. That fear propels them to turn the clock back — to defy the demographic wave that is coming.

The war against Hispanic voting, for instance, is happening not just for presidential reasons. It is also about local politics in states like Texas. "The New Attack on Hispanic Voting Rights," by Jim Ruttenberg of *The New York Times* focused on city politics in Pasadena, Texas.

Wrote Ruttenberg: "Obama's election was followed by a sudden return of restrictive new voting laws, most of them disproportionately affecting minorities, that were enacted by newly empowered Republican legislatures throughout the country."

The John Roberts Supreme Court aided this offensive by gutting enforcement provisions of the Voting Rights Act. The Roberts' majority's logic was that America's racist restriction of voting was ended. But if you follow Ruttenberg's reporting out of Pasadena, the drive to intimidate and exclude minority citizens from the ballot box is alive and well in Texas.

Voting is the most basic American right. The people whom GOP lawyers seek to intimidate are citizens. All of this is reminiscent of the Jim Crow era in which poll taxes, voter tests and implied violence were used to keep blacks away from the polls in the South.

In January, we will mark Martin Luther King Day. Dr. King's legacy includes the liberation of the South from a debilitating way of life in which political control was achieved through violence.

In the long term, racism is not a healthy credo for a nation. It means every citizen — the perpetrators as well as the victims.

Is Frankenfish on your diet?

By TOM COLICCHIO
 For *The New York Times*

Are consumers smart enough to be trusted with their own food choices?

Some lawmakers tried to insert language into must-pass spending legislation that would block states from giving consumers the right to know whether their food contains genetically modified ingredients.

It was not included.

Nine out of 10 Americans want GMO disclosure on food packages, according to a 2013 *New York Times* poll, just like consumers in 64 other nations. But powerful members of the agriculture and appropriations committees, along with their allies in agribusiness corporations like Monsanto, want to keep consumers in the dark. That's why opponents of that effort called it the DARK Act — or the Deny Americans the Right to Know Act.

As a chef, I'm proud of the food I serve. The idea that I would try to hide what's in my food from my customers offends everything I believe in. It's also really bad for business.

Why, then, have companies like Kellogg and groups like the Grocery Manufacturers Association spent millions in recent years to lobby against transparency? They say, in effect: "Trust us, folks. We looked into it. GMO ingredients are safe." But what they're missing is that consumers want to make their own judgments. Consumers are saying: "Trust me. Let me do my own homework and make my own choices."

In fact, some of us have done our homework, and here's what we found: The use of GMOs has led to unintended consequences. For instance, most GMO crops are engineered to withstand blasts of a powerful weed killer that the World Health Organization has decided probably causes cancer. New "superweeds" are appearing that require even more lethal formulations. Since the introduction of GMO crops, use of these chemi-



Tom Colicchio

This new engineered fish could be marketed as ... Atlantic salmon.



Via Wikimedia Commons

A snakehead murrel close-up from Banyumas, Central Java, Indonesia. After its release in North American waters, this fish was often called Frankenfish because of its look, aggressiveness and ability to live outside water. It is not genetically modified.

cal has increased 16-fold.

GMO advocates like to label anyone who objects "anti-science." It's true that genetic technology has had an amazing impact on the development of medicine and the eradication of infectious diseases. If GMO foods were actually providing a clear benefit to the public, like improved nutrition, lower costs or better taste, without creating a spiral of ever-increasing toxicity in our environment, I'd be all for them. And if GMOs ever deliver on their promise to improve food security, which they have yet to do in the more than 20 years since they were introduced, I'd be over the moon.

Vermont recently passed a law requiring the labeling of these foods. Other states are considering doing the same. That's the impetus behind this backdoor effort: Opponents want Congress to pre-empt Vermont and other like-minded states from implementing these rules.

The federal government already requires labeling of ingredients and basic nutritional information and regulates against marketing that misleads the public. In this context, labeling GMOs makes sense.

But that's not what is happening. Consider the situation of genetically engineered salmon.

Last month the Food and Drug Administration approved for sale to the public the first genetically engineered animal approved for human consumption — a fish they are calling the AquAdvantage salmon.

This "super" salmon was conceived

by combining genes from Chinook salmon that produce extra growth hormone with an "antifreeze" gene from a bottom-feeder, the non-Kosher ocean pout. The result is a fish that grows far faster and larger than nonengineered salmon.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration insists the transgenic fish is safe for humans, but many experts believe they have yet to prove AquAdvantage will be safe for the environment or other fish. Factory fish farms depend on the use of antibiotics and pesticides to control disease and parasites that flourish in high-density environments. The waste they release can decimate other marine life and contaminate the water supply. Farmed fish often escape into larger waters, endangering native species. While these new salmon will be sterile, mistakes can happen.

Fine, you say. Enough already. If you don't like the Frankenfish, don't buy it.

But there's the rub. This new engineered fish could be marketed as ... Atlantic salmon. There might be no way for consumers to identify it as genetically engineered.

Consumers have a right to seek out food produced in accordance with their values, and not be misled by an industry's strenuous efforts to keep them in the dark. When GMO ingredients are clearly labeled, consumers can exercise those rights.

Blocking the labeling of GMO foods would be a step in the wrong direction, away from greater accountability and responsibility. Congress should reject these efforts to block our right to know.

Tom Colicchio is a chef, owner of Crafted Hospitality and co-founder of Food Policy Action.

President Obama's legacy or bust

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — Recently, Barack Obama gained the second jewel in his foreign policy triple crown: the Paris climate accord. It follows his Iran nuclear deal and awaits but the closing of Guantanamo to complete his glittering legacy.

To be sure, Obama will not be submitting the climate agreement for Senate ratification. It would have no chance of passing — as with the Iranian nuclear deal, also never submitted for the Senate ratification Obama knew he'd never get.

And if he does close Guantanamo, it will be in defiance of overwhelming bipartisan congressional opposition.

You see, visionary thinkers like Obama cannot be bound by normal constitutional strictures. Indeed, the very unpopularity of his most cherished diplomatic goals is proof of their prophetic farsightedness.

Yet the climate deal brought back from Paris by Secretary of State John Kerry turns out to be no deal at all. It is, instead, a series of carbon-reducing promises made individually and unilaterally by the world's nations.

No enforcement, no sanctions, nothing legally binding. No matter, explained Kerry on "Fox News Sunday": "This mandatory reporting requirement ... is a serious form of enforcement, if you will, of compliance, but there is no penalty for it, obviously."

If you think that's gibberish, you're not alone. NASA scientist James Hansen, America's leading carbon abolitionist, indelicately called the whole deal "bulls—."

He's right.

The great Paris achievement is supposed to be global "transparency." But what can that possibly amount to when you can't even trust the reporting? Just three months ago, the world's greatest carbon emitter, China, admitted to having underreported its burning of coal by 17 percent, a staggering error (assuming it wasn't a deliberate deception) equal to the entire coal consumption of Germany.

I'm a climate-change agnostic. But I'm realistic enough to welcome prudent hedging against a possible worst-case scenario. I've long advocated for a multilateral agreement (unilateral U.S. actions being climatologically useless and economically suicidal) negotiated with the most important players — say, India, China and the European Union — containing real limits, real numbers and real enforcement. That would be a genuine achievement.

What the climate-change conference produced instead was hot air, applauded by 196 well-fed participants. (Fourteen nights in Paris, after all.) China promises to begin reducing carbon emissions 15 years from now. India announced it will be tripling its coal-fired electricity capacity by 2030. Meanwhile, the Obama administration is effectively dismantling America's entire coal industry.

Looking for guidance on how the U.S. will fare under this new environmental regime? Take a glance at Obama's other great triumph, the Iran nuclear accord.

Does the American public know that the Iranian parliament has never approved it? And that the Iranian president has never signed it? Iran is not legally bound to anything. As the State Department freely admitted



Charles Krauthammer

(in a letter to Rep. Mike Pompeo of the House Intelligence Committee), the deal "is not a treaty or an executive agreement, and is not a signed document." But don't worry. Its success "will depend not on whether it is legally binding or signed, but rather on the extensive verification measures" and our "capacity to reimpose — and ramp up — our sanctions if Iran does not meet its commitments."

And how is that going?

On Nov. 21, Iran conducted its second test of a nuclear-capable ballistic missile in direct contravention of two U.N. Security Council prohibitions, including one that incorporates the current nuclear agreement — which bans such tests for eight years.

Our response? After Iran's first illegal launch in October, the administration did nothing. A few words at the United Nations. Weren't we repeatedly assured that any Iranian violation would be met with vigorous action? No worry, again. As U.N. Ambassador Samantha Power told a congressional hearing last week, "discussions are a form of U.N. action."

The heart sinks.

It was obvious from the very beginning that the whole administration promise of "snapback" sanctions was a farce. The Iranians knew it. Hence their contempt for even the prospect of American pushback: two illegal missile launches conducted ostentatiously even before sanctions are lifted and before they receive their \$150 billion in unfrozen assets early next year.

Why not? They know Obama will ignore, downplay and explain away any violation, lest it jeopardize his transformative foreign policy legacy.

It's a legacy of political agreements. The proliferators and the polluters are not bound. By our own volition, we are.

Only Guantanamo remains. Within a month, one-sixth of the remaining prisoners will be released. Obama will not be denied.