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Leading by lawsuit is blunt instrument

A pending lawsuit by an environmental group is the latest challenge to federal salmon and steelhead hatcheries on the Columbia River, a decades-old system that has also faced some congressional scrutiny in recent years. Although salmon propagation practices do merit ongoing re-examination, defunding these Mitchell Act hatcheries would be a serious mistake.

The Wild Fish Conservancy, a small advocacy group based in Duvall, Washington, argues the federal agencies that provide money for hatcheries haven't coordinated their actions and aren't in compliance with the Endangered Species Act. According to the WFC, federal hatcheries harm "ESA-listed species and their critical habits through a variety of mechanisms, including facility effects, fish removal activities, genetic and ecological interactions, harvest and monitoring and evaluation."

The federal hatcheries, along with others operated by the states, are mainly responsible for maintaining salmon runs now that the river system is dammed. The result of compromises hammered out between many parties, including Columbia River treaty tribes, hatcheries are a vital lifeline for the economies of many communities.

"Carefully managed hatcheries play a critical role in Columbia Basin salmon recovery by

rebuilding salmon populations while supporting fisheries," said Paul Lumley, executive director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. "Lawsuits like these could hurt salmon recovery efforts and distract us from the bigger picture of working together to reform hatchery practices."

Liz Hamilton, executive director of the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association, pointed out that killing hatchery funding would also mean loss of tens of millions in funding for conservation and recovery.

The state of Washington's separate move to designate some Columbia tributaries for wild steelhead also generates some concern in river communities, but is a far more deliberative plan than the wholesale withdrawal of funding WFC advocates for federal hatcheries.

Refinements in federal and state hatchery practices should be encouraged.

However, fisheries management by lawsuit is never a good idea.

Wal-Mart is fickle

When it comes to Wal-Mart, beware what you wish for. Here is what is happening in some 100 towns across America. Bloomberg Business Week reports that when Wal-Mart closed more than 100 small stores, it left several small towns without a grocery. Why? Because Wal-Mart's entry into their markets had already killed longtime local small grocers.

In retail and other lines of business, it has become an article of faith that consumer loyalty has vanished. Shoppers are fickle, abandoning long-established brands and stores for the faceless, anonymous market on the Internet. What those shoppers fail to realize when they yearn for a market-wrecker like Wal-Mart is that it, too, can be quite fickle.

Many Clatsop County shoppers itch for Wal-Mart to build its Warrenton store. And why not? It is economically rational to seek low prices. And the day likely

will arrive when the walls go up in Warrenton.

Wal-Mart's presence will put some Clatsop County businesses in jeopardy. At the same time, Wal-Mart will not be a community player. That is something that Wal-Mart shoppers fail to realize when they abandon locally owned businesses in favor of the rootless cost-cutter. Wal-Mart is one of those multi-national businesses that lives everywhere and nowhere. It has no loyalty and it will not help nurture the local nonprofit sector, which provides so much of Clatsop County's quality of life.

Newcomers to Astoria, Warrenton, Gearhart and Seaside value the individuality of our communities. They like it that our places have not succumbed to the anonymity that has consumed so many cities and suburbs, and that includes the numbing effect that Wal-Mart has on local enterprise.

Social Media: Destroyer or creator?

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN
New York Times News Service

Over the last few years we've been treated to a number of "Facebook revolutions," from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street to the squares of Istanbul, Kiev and Hong Kong, all fueled by social media.

But once the smoke cleared, most of these revolutions failed to build any sustainable new political order, in part because as so many voices got amplified, consensus-building became impossible.

Question: Does it turn out that social media is better at breaking things than at making things?

Last month an important voice answered this question with a big "yes." That voice was

Wael Ghonim, the Egyptian Google employee whose anonymous Facebook page helped to launch the Tahrir Square revolution in early 2011 that toppled President Hosni Mubarak — but then failed to give birth to a true democratic alternative.

In December, Ghonim, who has since moved to Silicon Valley, posted a TED talk about what went wrong. It is worth watching and begins like this: "I once said, 'If you want to liberate a society, all you need is the Internet.' I was wrong. I said those words back in 2011, when a Facebook page I anonymously created helped spark the Egyptian revolution. The Arab Spring revealed social media's greatest potential, but it also exposed its greatest shortcomings. The same tool that united us to topple dictators eventually tore us apart."

In the early 2000s, Arabs were flocking to the Web, Ghonim explained: "Thirsty for knowledge, for opportunities, for connecting with the rest of the people around the globe, we escaped our frustrating political realities and lived a virtual, alternative life."

And then in June 2010, he noted, the "Internet changed my life forever. While browsing Facebook, I saw a photo ... of a tortured, dead body of a young Egyptian guy. His name was Khaled Said. Khaled was a 29-year-old Alexandrian who was killed by police. I saw myself in his picture. ... I anonymously created a Facebook page and called it 'We Are All Khaled Said.' In just three days, the page had over 100,000 people, fellow Egyptians who shared the same concern."

Soon Ghonim and his friends used Facebook to crowdsource ideas, and "the page became the most followed page in the Arab world. ... Social media was crucial for this campaign. It helped



Thomas L. Friedman



Tara Todras-Whitehill/AP Photo

Egyptian Wael Ghonim, center, a Google Inc. marketing manager who was a key organizer of the online campaign that sparked the first protest, talks to the crowd in Tahrir Square, in Cairo, Egypt, Feb. 8, 2011.

a decentralized movement arise. It made people realize that they were not alone. And it made it impossible for the regime to stop it."

Ghonim was eventually tracked down in Cairo by Egyptian security services, beaten and then held incommunicado for 11 days. But three days after he was freed, the millions of protesters his Facebook posts helped to galvanize brought down Mubarak's regime.

Alas, the euphoria soon faded, said Ghonim, because "we failed to build consensus, and the political struggle led to intense polarization." Social media, he noted, "only amplified" the polarization "by facilitating the spread of misinformation, rumors, echo chambers and hate speech. The environment was purely toxic. My online world became a battleground filled with trolls, lies, hate speech."

Supporters of the army and the Islamists used social media to smear each other, while the democratic center, which Ghonim and so many others occupied, was marginalized. Their revolution was stolen by the Muslim Brotherhood and, when it failed, by the army, which then arrested many of the secular youths who first powered the revolution. The army has its own Facebook page to defend itself.

"It was a moment of defeat," said Ghonim. "I stayed silent for more than two years, and I used the time to reflect on everything that happened."

Here is what he concluded about social media today: "First, we don't know how to deal with rumors. Rumors that confirm people's biases

'We don't know how to deal with rumors.'

Wael Ghonim

are now believed and spread among millions of people." Second, "We tend to only communicate with people that we agree with, and thanks to social media, we can mute, unfollow and block everybody else. Third, online discussions quickly descend into angry mobs. ... It's as if we forget that the people behind screens are actually real people and not just avatars."

"And fourth, it became really hard to change our opinions. Because of the speed and brevity of social media, we are forced to jump to conclusions and write sharp opinions in 140 characters about complex world affairs. And once we do that, it lives forever on the Internet."

Fifth, and most crucial, he said, "today, our social media experiences are designed in a way that favors broadcasting over engagements, posts over discussions, shallow comments over deep conversations. ... It's as if we agreed that we are here to talk at each other instead of talking with each other."

Ghonim has not given up. He and a few friends recently started a website, Parlio.com, to host intelligent, civil conversations about controversial and often heated issues, with the aim of narrowing gaps, not widening them. (I participated in a debate on Parlio and found it engaging and substantive.)

"Five years ago," concluded Ghonim, "I said, 'If you want to liberate society, all you need is the Internet.' Today I believe if we want to liberate society, we first need to liberate the Internet."

Hillary Clinton's dutiful election slog

By FRANK BRUNI
New York Times News Service

Late Monday, as the unfinished vote count suggested the slimmest of victories for Hillary Clinton, she stepped to a microphone, flashed an Oscar-worthy smile of triumph and told supporters that she was "breathing a big sigh of relief."

She wasn't. She isn't. And she definitely shouldn't be.

That's not because what happened in Iowa — almost a tie between her and Bernie Sanders — substantially loosens her grip on the Democratic presidential nomination. Iowa was better terrain for Sanders than much of what lies ahead, and the dynamics that made her a heavy favorite to be the nominee before the state's caucuses make her a heavy favorite still.

But Iowa demonstrated, yet again, what a flawed and tarnished candidate she is. And on the Republican side, the caucuses augured the possibility of a retreat from the party's craziness and the rise of an adversary, Marco Rubio, who could give her trouble in a general-election matchup.

She should have trounced Sanders. Yes, he communicates authenticity to an electorate ravenous for it and has given potent voice to Americans' economic angst. But little in his Senate career suggests that he'd be able to turn that oratory into remedy.

He's no gushing font of political charisma. He's a 74-year-old, self-proclaimed socialist who until fairly recently had minimal name recognition outside of Vermont.

President Barack Obama clearly prefers Clinton. And in a poll of Democrats showing up for the Iowa caucuses, well over half said that they wanted someone who would continue Obama's agenda — which is the precise pledge that Clinton has been making over the last few weeks — while only about one-third said that they preferred

someone more liberal.

Even so, Clinton appears to have edged out Sanders by mere decimal points. How to explain it?

Perhaps with the sturdiest truism of politics: Elections are about the future. And so much about Clinton screams the past.

A rally of hers that I attended in Iowa last week actually began with a high-lights reel of Clinton through time, including plenty of footage from the 1990s.

I understand why. The retrospective underscored her extraordinary experience. But nothing in her subsequent speech looked forward as stirring as those images looked backward.

Iowa demonstrated, yet again, what a flawed and tarnished candidate she is.

She's forever stressing what she's put up with, what she's survived. "I've been around a long time," she said in Des Moines a week ago, answering — but not really — a young voter's question about the dearth of enthusiasm for her. "They throw all this stuff at me, and I'm still standing."

Bill Clinton may well garner applause, but every time he stumps for her, it's an implicit promise to revisit yesterday, not to chart tomorrow. On Monday night, he and Chelsea stood with her as she spoke, and I was struck by the overwhelming familiarity of that tableau. It has been with us for a quarter



Frank Bruni

of a century.

At this point the Clintons are royalty, and royalty sits at a remove from all else. Among Democratic caucusgoers most concerned about voting for a candidate who cared about people like them, 74 percent picked Sanders, while only 22 percent chose Clinton. (Martin O'Malley got the remainder.)

For caucusgoers acting primarily on the basis of who they deemed most "honest and trustworthy," 83 percent voted for Sanders, while just 10 percent voted for Clinton. That's the toll of all the attention to her emails, a topic that's not disappearing anytime soon.

She has a habit, whether addressing a large group or a small one, of diving so deeply into the weeds of a subject that she doesn't so much impress listeners as exhaust them. To her credit, she has educated herself more thoroughly than other politicians. But she somehow hasn't learned to wear that erudition lightly.

For months Democrats have been heartened by the absurdity with which Donald Trump infused the Republican primary and by the prospect of him or Ted Cruz as the party's nominee. But his second-place showing could be his twilight, and Rubio's strong third-place finish supports the scenario that he's the one.

He poses a bigger threat to Clinton. He understands that she, like Jeb Bush, is an awkward fit for the national mood, and he'd try to take advantage of that. He leans hard on his youth. He talks about a new generation.

Clinton needs to persuade voters that as much as they've seen of her, she can still lead them to a place they've not yet seen. She hasn't succeeded, and she slogs on from Iowa much as she did eight years ago: with more to prove than to savor.