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Make certain drinking water is safe

Parents, children and officials are right to exercise great caution when it comes to lead

Some believe lead contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire. Heavily used in ancient times for many purposes including sweetening wine, it caused an array of illnesses — everything from neurological damage to sterility. Added to paint and gasoline in 20th century America, it is thought lead's corrosive effects on brains and bodies contributed to youth violence and poor school performance by inner-city kids.

The quantity of lead found in drinking water in some Oregon schools is far below the astronomical levels that once caused devastating diseases. But parents, children and officials are right to exercise great caution when it comes to lead. Even a cursory search on the internet for information about lead exposure turns up literally millions of frightening references. Symptoms include everything from learning difficulties and loss of appetite to hearing loss and constipation.

Modern-day Oregon parents aren't inclined to take such news sitting down, particularly after shocking news of widespread lead exposure and official indifference in Flint, Michigan.

Astoria, Seaside and Warrenton-Hammond schools are all at various stages of conducting tests of drinking water, with results expected well before school starts this fall. Statewide, Gov. Kate Brown has recommended tests by school districts and licensed child care

facilities — the state doesn't have legal authority to insist on these tests.

It's obvious that everyone who looks after children should make certain drinking water is safe. Testing and prompt remediation of plumbing systems that leach lead into water is essential — sooner the better.

In Astoria and surrounding communities, many homes and commercial buildings date from a time before there was much concern about lead. Even some relatively new homes have the potential of exposing residents to unacceptable levels of lead and copper — the latter also can cause health problems. It wasn't until 1991 that the federal Safe Drinking Water Act began heightening awareness of the issue.

None of this is panic-worthy. Rational precautions by families and school officials will substantially lower any risk that might stem from low-level lead exposure. But it is worth paying attention to, and making certain authorities follow through on their promises.

Why not let people vote?

Oregon's vote-by-mail protocol is an undisputed success

Every four years Oregon becomes a topic of discussion. At a time when Republican legislatures create hurdles to minorities and working-class voters, Oregon is expanding its electorate and making it easier to vote.

Michael Wines of *The New York Times* noticed Oregon's new access to voter registration through motor vehicle licensing. "From January through April," wrote Wines, "Oregon added nearly 52,000 new voters to it rolls by standing the usual voter-registration process on its head."

Comments from election researchers as well as Oregon Secretary of State Jeanne

Atkins make clear that registering voters does not necessarily lead to more ballots cast. It will take two or three years to learn the full impact of our motor vehicle voter registration law.

But Oregon's vote-by-mail protocol is an undisputed success. We Oregonians are not forced to gamble on how long we will wait at the polls. We have three weeks to cast our vote. Repeated studies have demonstrated there is minuscule fraud with Oregon's mail ballots.

Colorado and Washington state have imitated us. And sooner or later, other states will see the wisdom of our bold 1998 innovation.

Trump: Lord of the lies

By TIMOTHY EGAN
New York Times News Service

This month, the world's most battle-scarred cable news network did something extraordinary in this year of vaporous political contrails. While Donald Trump was delivering one of his easily debunked lies, CNN fact-checked him — in near real time at the bottom of the screen.

"Trump: I never said Japan should have nukes (he did)." Thus read the chyron that shook the television world — maybe.

I no more expect CNN to set Wolf Blitzer's beard on fire than to instantly call out the Mount Everest of liars. Trump lies about big things (there is no drought in California) and small things (his hair spray could not affect the ozone layer because it's sealed within Trump Tower). He lies about himself, and the fake self he invented to talk about himself. He's been shown to lie more than 70 times in a single event.

Given the scale of Trump's mendacity and the stakes for the free world, it's time that we go into the fall debates with a new rule — an instant fact-check on statements made by the candidates onstage. The Presidential Debate Commission should do what any first-grader with Google access can do, and call out lies before the words hit the floor.

Setting up a truth referee is not difficult. And while doing such a thing is unlikely to ensure that the debates would be substantive, it could at least guarantee a reality foundation at a time when fact-free speech is the language of the political class.

How can we discuss the economy when Trump suggests that the unemployment rate, just under 5 percent, is actually 42 percent? Or debate the Paris climate accord, when Trump falsely claims it "gives foreign bureaucrats control over how much energy we

use on our land"? Or deal with terrorism, after Trump said he knows "more about ISIS than the generals." The debates are meaningless without a neutral party screening the garbage.

Professional truth-seekers have never seen anything like Trump, surely the most compulsive liar to seek high office. To date, the nonpartisan PolitiFact has rated 76 percent of his statements lies — 57 percent false or mostly false, and another 19 percent "Pants on Fire" fabrications. Only 2 percent — 2 percent! — of his assertions were rated true, and another 6 percent mostly true. Hillary Clinton, who is not exactly known for fealty to the facts, had a 28 percent total lie score, including a mere 1 percent Pants on Fire.

The Washington Post's Fact Checker has dinged Trump with 30 of its Four Pinocchio ratings — lying 70 percent of the time. Trump cares so little about the truth that when the Fact Checker reaches out to him for an explanation, he never responds, the paper noted.

Trump got his start on the national political stage as a liar, playing to the birther fantasies of Barack Obama's worst haters. One of the questions he might be asked in the three fall debates is what, exactly, he discovered when he claimed his investigators "cannot believe what they're finding" in Hawaii five years ago.

With Trump University, he created a business model built on a house of lies. An executive called it "a total lie," and a sales manager said it was a "fraudulent scheme" designed to bilk vulnerable clients, according to court testimony. It was that class-action lawsuit



Timothy Egan

Sadly, a lot of voters don't care if a candidate is a pathological liar. But most of us should.

For a while, I tried to chart the days of his lies, and just got overwhelmed. He said the suicide of the former Clinton aide Vince Foster was "very fishy," when five separate investigations found it to be a sad self-killing and nothing more. He could have looked at the U.S. Drought Monitor before saying "there is no drought" at the very California site that is now in its fifth year of an epic arid spell.

He even lies about his lies. He claimed he wanted to keep a personal donation to veterans private, when in fact he'd boasted in January of a \$1 million gift, which wasn't sent out until the press began questioning him on it months later.

Sadly, a lot of voters don't care if a candidate is a pathological liar. But most of us should. It's up to the debate commission, as they set the rules for the fall, to ensure that truth has a place on the stage.

Hillary and the horizontals

By PAUL KRUGMAN
New York Times News Service

I spent much of this politically momentous week at a workshop on inequality, where papers were presented on everything from the causes of wage disparities to the effects of inequality on happiness. As so often happens at conferences, however, what really got me thinking was a question during a coffee break: "Why don't you talk more about horizontal inequality?"

What? Horizontal inequality is the term of art for inequality measured, not between individuals, but between racially or culturally defined groups. (Of course, race itself is mainly a cultural construct rather than a fact of nature — Americans of Italian or even Irish extraction weren't always considered white.) And it struck me that horizontal thinking is what you need to understand what went down in both parties' nominating seasons: It's what led to Donald Trump, and also why Hillary Clinton beat back Bernie Sanders. And like it or not, horizontal inequality, racial inequality above all, will define the general election.

You can argue that it shouldn't be that way. One way to think about the Sanders campaign is that it was based on the premise that if only progressives were to make a clear enough case about the evils of inequality among individuals, they could win over the whole working class, regardless of race. In one interview, Sanders declared that if the media were doing its job, Republicans would be a fringe party receiving only 5 or 10 percent of the vote.

But that's a pipe dream. Defining oneself at least in part by membership in a group is part of human nature. Even

if you try to step away from such definitions, other people won't. A rueful old line from my own heritage says that if you should happen to forget that you're Jewish, someone will remind you: a truth reconfirmed by the upsurge in vocal anti-Semitism unleashed by the Trump phenomenon.

So group identity is an unavoidable part of politics, especially in America with its history of slavery and its ethnic diversity. Racial and ethnic minorities know that very well, which is one reason they overwhelmingly supported Hillary Clinton, who gets it, over Sanders, with his exclusive focus on individual inequality. And politicians know it too.

Indeed, the road to Trumpism began with ideological conservatives cynically exploiting America's racial divisions. The modern Republican Party's central policy agenda of cutting taxes on the rich while slashing benefits has never been very popular, even among its own voters. It won elections nonetheless by getting working-class whites to think of themselves as a group under siege, and to see government programs as giveaways to Those People.

Or to put it another way, the Republican Party was able to serve the interests of the 1 percent by posing as the defender of the 80 percent — for that was the white share of the electorate when Ronald Reagan was elected.

But demographic change — rapid growth in the Hispanic and Asian population — has brought the non-Hispanic white share of the electorate down to 62 percent and falling. Republicans need to broaden their base; but the base wants candidates who will defend the old racial order. Hence Trumpism.

And race-based political mobiliza-



Paul Krugman

I wish I could say that it will be a battle of ideas.

tion cuts both ways. Black and Hispanic support for Democrats makes obvious sense, given the fact that these are relatively low-income groups that benefit disproportionately from progressive policies. They have, for example, seen very sharp reductions in the number of uninsured since Obamacare went into effect. But the overwhelming nature of that support reflects group identity.

Furthermore, some groups with relatively high income, like Jews and, increasingly, Asian-Americans, also vote strongly Democratic. Why? The

answer in both cases, surely, is the suspicion that the same racial animus that drives many people to vote Republican could, all too easily, turn against other groups with a long history of persecution. And as I've already mentioned, we are indeed seeing a lot of right-wing anti-Semitism breaking out into the open. Does anyone doubt that a reservoir of anti-Asian prejudice is similarly lurking just under the surface?

So now comes the general election. I wish I could say that it will be a battle of ideas. But it mostly won't, and not just because Trump doesn't have any coherent policy ideas.

No, this is going to be mostly an election about identity. The Republican nominee represents little more than the rage of white men over a changing nation. And he'll be facing a woman — yes, gender is another important dimension in this story — who owes her nomination to the very groups his base hates and fears.

The odds are that Clinton will prevail, because the county has already moved a long way in her direction. But one thing is for sure: It's going to be ugly.

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