

OPINION

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We're 'Dumbing Down' as a Nation

Political forces push America back

BY WILLIAM MCCARTNEY

As pundits and politicians argue about what the GOP midterm election sweep means, there are growing and disturbing signs that America increasingly is moving (and voting) to retreat from our nation's commitment to scientific research and knowledge. We're "dumbing down" collectively as a nation.

Although economic issues get more attention, we shouldn't dare overlook the increasing array of political forces pushing America back from the intellectual sophisti-

cation and scientific accomplishments that brought our nation to its pinnacle of power, prestige and influence.

In our rush to fulfill political objectives and economic wants, we've embraced an anti-intellectual mindset. A growing number of politicians either deny sound scientific knowledge in various areas, or have found it prudent to make their constituents think they do.

Perhaps they have been influenced by their tea party backing, but in the recent elections, a sober-

ing number of GOP candidates, including those in 19 of 20 in contested Senate races, denied society's contribution to global warming. Most of them don't even accept the reality of this environmental time bomb.

The preponderance of empirical evidence is that our planet is experiencing an unprecedented warming -- and humans contribute significantly to it. Scientists attribute our oceans' growing acidity to greater amounts of CO2 in the atmosphere. Ice cores in glaciers give an

historic timeline for the escalating levels of pollution in recent years. Melting polar ice caps have opened sea lanes over the top of the world that never existed before.

Granted, a few isolated scientists dispute these claims. Likewise, a few scientists say baseball players can't throw a curve. Try telling that to batters.

The alliance between politics and this anti-intellectualism often plays out in tea party rallies, whether from the platform or among the faithful. A founder of one regional tea party unit complained, "This so-called climate change is just ridiculous. It's all just a money-control avenue."

A small business owner in Indiana complained about climate change legislation. "They're trying to use global warming against the people. I cannot help but believe the Lord placed a lot of minerals in our country and they're not there to destroy us." A man from Connecticut declared that global warming doesn't exist, "because we can't afford to correct the problem."

Recent administrations not only took actions diametrically opposed to the scientific community (e.g., prohibiting stem cell research), but also decimated many government scientific agencies by replacing relevantly trained professionals with political hacks.

Many politically fashionable economic policies also unmask the growing intellectual nihilism. It's politically popular to embrace the deception that lower taxes are the panacea for economic ills. Such facile anti-intellectualism is in stark contrast to the strong words and recurring testimony of the bulk of our nation's best economists--even including conservatives like David Stockman and Alan Greenspan.

In the mid 19th century, the "Know Nothing" movement was known for its negativism, especially against Catholics, Jews, and immigrants. Its proponents earned their name because members were instructed to answer questions by saying, "I know nothing."

There's an interesting parallel between the "Know Nothings" and today's growing disdain for science. Just as the folks 150 years ago refused to acknowledge knowing anything, today's counterparts refuse to acknowledge there's anything for them to know--except their preconceived notions.

When politicians disparage established science because of its inconvenience, it jeopardizes our nation's leadership role and our future.

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TOO MUCH SPENT ON THE MILITARY, NOT ENOUGH ON CLIMATE CHANGE PREVENTION:



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