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OUR VIEW

Give thanks for the miracle of agriculture

The subject of food always sparks a lively conversation these days. Everyone seems to have a unique perspective on what’s right — and wrong — with our food. No matter how food is produced, someone will have something to say about it: How and where it’s grown and what’s in it.

And that’s fine. The marketplace ultimately sorts that out.

But one thing you never hear is that there’s not enough food. Think about it. Every day, 326 million people in the U.S. eat three meals. That’s 356,970,000,000 meals this year. And last year, and the year before, going back as far as anyone can remember. If hunger has ever existed in the U.S., it was not because of a lack of food production.

Often a discussion about agriculture circles around to the “food system.” We’re not real sure what that is. In our eyes, food is not produced by a

“system,” it’s produced by farmers and ranchers, 2.1 million of them, men and women, who get out of bed every morning to work the land and tend the herds and flocks. Together, they cultivate and graze 922 million acres to raise \$394 billion worth of crops each year.

The interesting factoid is that the amount of food produced in the U.S. has gone up as the number of farmers and ranchers has gone down.

That’s not a “system.” That’s a miracle.

Yet everyone seems to take the bounty for granted. Most of the public still seems to believe that food comes from the supermarket or that Old MacDonald grew it.

The fact is, most farmers and ranchers devote their lives to producing food and fiber. They use technology, the latest research and innovative products techniques to do it. Most of



EO file photo

Isela Bautista, center, of Sunnyside, Washington, restocks ears of corn at her booth for Bautista Farms on Sept. 20 at the Hermiston Farmers Market.

them grew up on a farm or ranch. They learned farming not only at a land-grant college or university but from their parents and grandparents.

That’s why there’s more to farming than meets the eye. Yes, it’s a business, but it’s also a way of life that has been passed down through generations, all way back before the founding of the republic. In point of fact, farming can be traced back 12,000 years to the

beginnings of civilization. This week Americans celebrated with a day of thanks. For family, for shelter and for the many blessings we enjoy in this great nation.

We all have much for which to be grateful. Among them is the fact that we in the U.S. are the beneficiaries of a miracle. We live in a land of plenty, and we have farmers and ranchers to thank for it.

OTHER VIEWS

The chastened establishment

What should we do during the next two years of divided government? We could spend them as we’ve spent the last two: React to every Trump outrage. Keep Trump’s narcissistic provocations at center stage. Express daily contempt from within the safety of our political silos.

This seems to be the business model for cable news and online media. There’s a big, reliable audience of people who will tune in to feel appalled by and superior to President Donald Trump, and who are addicted to their daily rituals of moral onanism.

On the other hand, we could put the Trump soap opera off to the side and pay attention to actual Americans and actual solutions. We could acknowledge that we are an evenly divided country. We could build the bipartisan governing coalitions and agendas suited to that reality.

Fortunately, many people are opting for plan B. For example, the Convergence Center for Policy Resolution gathers stakeholders across the political spectrum and gets them working together on common visions — union bosses with Walmart executives, teacher union leaders with charter school heads.

Washington think tanks are undergoing a fundamental evolution. A lot of them, like the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution, were built to advise parties that no longer exist. They were built for a style of public debate — based on social science evidence and congressional hearings that are more than just show trials — that no longer exists. Many people at these places have discovered that they have more in common with one another than they do with the extremists on their own sides.

So suddenly there is a flurry of working together across ideological lines. Next week, for example, the group Opportunity America, with Brookings and AEI, will release a bipartisan agenda called “Work, Skills, Community: Restoring Opportunity for the Working Class.”

Written by a wide array of scholars, the report starts with the truth that the working class has been mostly ignored by the rest of society. Government has welfare programs to serve the poor and they have programs like 529 savings accounts to subsidize the rich. But there’s very little for families making, say, \$50,000 a year.

Businesses like Amazon will invest in rich places like New York and Northern Virginia, but they won’t invest much in working-class communities in Ohio or Kentucky. Universities, religious organizations and activist groups will recruit from the affluent suburbs and serve those in dire poverty, but they barely touch the working class.

What you get is a layer of society that has been denuded of institutions and social bonds. Working-class men have been dropping out of the labor force at alarming



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

rates. A generation ago, working-class families were about as likely to be part of religious communities as affluent Americans, but now their participation rates have plummeted. A generation ago, working-class families were nearly as likely to be married as affluent people, but now only half the children in working-class families will be raised in adolescence by stably married parents. From the 1970s

to the 2000s, the share of working-class people aged 25 to 60 who were involved in a neighborhood organization fell from 71 percent to 52 percent.

As the authors of the Opportunity America report lay out the evidence, you see how the debate has evolved over the past few years. First, there used to be relatively little research attention paid to the working class at all. Now it’s the epicenter. Second, there used to be a silly debate over whether economics or culture explained social breakdown. Now these two elements are woven seamlessly together. Third, geography plays a much bigger role. Social problems are concentrated in specific places.

The authors of this report dismiss the policy slogans coming from the extremes. Building a wall is not a policy. Universal basic income degrades the work ethic that is at the core of working-class life. Free college is a massive subsidy for the upper middle class.

Instead, the authors come up with a broad left/right agenda that 70 percent of Republicans and Democrats could support: wage subsidies, improved parental leave, work requirements for some federal benefits, child care tax credits.

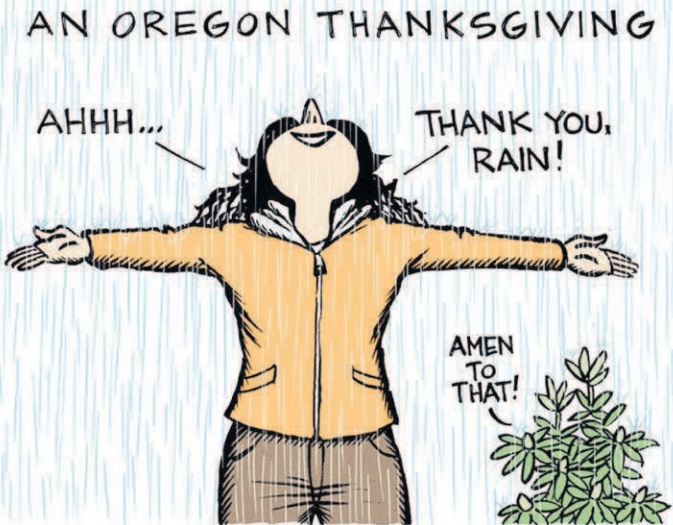
I especially like their point that we have overemphasized four-year colleges as the only route to success. In 2016, the federal government spent \$139 billion on postsecondary education and training. Only a sliver, 14 percent, went to career education and training. Private sector employers fetishize the college degree even where it’s unnecessary. Two-thirds of the job postings for production supervisors now require a college degree. But only 16 percent of the people currently holding those jobs have such a degree.

One of the core questions before us is this: Who is going to lead this country? Is it perpetual outsiders like Trump, with no governing or policy competence, who say the establishments have forfeited all credibility? Or are there enough chastened members of establishments, who have governing experience, who acknowledge past mistakes, who take the time to reconnect with the country and apply their expertise in new ways?

I don’t know about you, I’ll take a chastened establishment any day.

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David Brooks is a New York Times columnist.



Reviving due process on college campuses

The Wall Street Journal

For those awaiting a restoration of rational discourse in American politics, well, you’ll have to keep waiting. No other conclusion is possible after seeing the reaction to Education Secretary Betsy DeVos’s long-awaited regulatory proposals last week on handling accusations of sexual abuse on campus.

From California Democrat Maxine Waters: “Betsy DeVos, you won’t get away with what you are doing. We are organizing to put an end to your destruction of civil rights protections for students.”

Former Vice President Joe Biden said on Facebook that the proposal “would return us to the days when schools swept rape and assault under the rug and survivors were shamed into silence.”

The centerpiece of the proposed regulations is — hold your fire — restoring the right of cross-examination, one of the oldest and most hallowed elements of due process.

The Obama Department of Education, responding to legitimate concerns about sexual abuse on campus, issued guidelines that went overboard, casting away many basic protections for the accused. The result has subjected victims and the accused to a system of campus justice often controlled by amateurs and political activists.

For more than four decades the Department of Education has set Title IX policy by issuing “guidance,” which circumvents the normal rule-making process. The Obama-era sexual abuse guidance was essentially an administrative diktat. The public had no chance to comment, and universities, which understood federal funding was at risk, opted to dilute standard legal protections for accused students.

Secretary DeVos has instead followed normal rule-making to create a balance between protecting victims and the

rights of the accused. The proposals include “the right of every survivor to be taken seriously and the right of every person accused to know that guilt is not predetermined.” Both the alleged victim and the accused would be able to inspect and review all evidence.

All Title IX hearings would include cross-examination, which could occur in-person or by live stream, with campus adjudicators allowed to observe the demeanor of witnesses as they assess credibility. The statements of anyone who refuses cross-examination could not be considered in the final determination. Title IX judges would be required to consider both inculpatory and exculpatory evidence.

The proposed rule acknowledges how schools’ “treatment of both complainant and respondent could constitute discrimination on the basis of sex.” Both the alleged victim and the accused would enjoy the same opportunities for appeal, and, if both parties agreed, administrators could offer informal resolution processes like mediation.

One troubling aspect remains. Universities could still use a weaker “preponderance of evidence” as the standard of proof, similar to civil cases, rather than a higher “clear and convincing evidence” standard. Ms. DeVos mitigates this somewhat by barring universities from using this lower standard for only sexual assault or harassment if they rely on a higher standard for comparable disciplinary cases.

This is an attempt at compromise, but Mrs. DeVos will get no credit from the Democratic Party’s identity-politics police. Their standard now is essentially that the accused must prove his innocence no matter the lack of evidence against him, as we learned during the Senate’s Brett Kavanaugh crucible.

The proposed protections are nonetheless progress, and would go a long way to restore basic norms of fairness and justice to campus courts.

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