

## WHEN DID IGNORANCE BECOME A VIRTUE?

Ken Olson

Will Rogers said, “Everybody’s ignorant, just on different subjects,” an excellent statement reflecting humility and tolerance. I do not know a proton from a crouton, and neither do you, but accurate knowledge of some subjects should be required of Everyone tasked with making laws for the entire country. Consider Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who thinks California wildfires were caused by “Jewish space lasers” and that “the government” directed hurricanes. (She was rewarded by speaking at the GOP Convention.) How are people qualified to govern if they reject central facts of science and lack even a basic understanding of how nature works?

Several decades ago, I stated publicly that if people can be convinced that the earth is a mere 6,000 years old, they will also buy into almost any other radical idea. Many politicians are members of extremely fundamentalist churches that have felt threatened by the last two centuries of scientific discoveries. Such groups reacted by imposing a wooden literalism on the biblical Genesis texts; in so doing, they became centers of disinformation promoting absurdities.

Montana’s Governor Gianforte donated some \$290,000 to the “creationist museum” along the Interstate at Glendive. He thereby proved not only that he is very rich but also ignorant even of Fifth Grade science, for such stops portray humans living happily together with fearsome meat-eating dinosaurs, much as in The Flintstones cartoon –even maintaining that Tyrannosaurus rex “actually” ate grass!! What’s next for lawmakers of that mindset: budgets maintained by spinning straw into gold?

US Speaker of the House Johnson says that he “governs out of a biblical world view” and is a big fan of the theme park in Kentucky featuring a gigantic “full-size Noah’s Ark” (constructed with large taxpayer subsidies, by the way). He says, quite bizarrely, that “it promotes critical thinking.” (!) It’s the absolute opposite, since critical thinking does not begin with predetermined conclusions that ignore contrary evidence. The ticket booth doesn’t have a sign saying, “Check Your Brains Here” but it should. Local legislator Ed Butcher has an ARK sticker on his car, promoting that very same anti-science tourist trap.

Obviously, these people have never read St. Augustine, who wrote some 16 centuries ago -- with great sadness-- that such simplistic literalism about Genesis “would cause people to laugh the Bible to scorn” and to reject it before they even know what it is, something that’s happening right now.

Such ignorance, barely a notch above that of the flat-earthers, would be funny, were it not so destructive of common sense. Millions of scientists are appalled at such fantastical thinking, because there truly are dangerous consequences. How can intellects flooded with false information possibly be good stewards of the earth itself and of human wellness in society?

Thankfully, there are alternatives. (The History Channel devolved into the ludicrous Ancient Aliens Channel and Discovery into The Ghosts Are Everywhere Channel, but we don’t have to watch them.) Charles Pierce has commented on what happens when communities develop the collective Gut at the expense of the collective Mind: “It’s what results when we abandon our

duty to treat the ridiculous with ridicule. ...I am not obligated to treat transparent lunacy as though it was worthy of respect simply because it is popular. I am not obligated to be that nice a person. And neither are you.”

What we are obligated to do is to recognize the extreme danger of ignorance and speak out against it.

So, when did ignorance within the Republican party become a virtue? There are several reasons why so many there are not just tolerating ignorance but supporting it, vowing even to dismantle the Dept. of Education and the National Weather Service; but the biggest factor is Donald Trump himself, who has transformed the Party of Lincoln into an irrational personality cult. After all, it is Trump who suggested that “bleach inside the body” might cure a deadly virus, who says that wind towers cause cancer, and who recently raged against electric vehicles by asking what would happen if such an airplane went under a cloud: crash. So, friends, be warned: the batteries in your flashlight will not work in the dark!

So, in the Age of Science, we now have one political party that supported a self-designated “very stable genius” who is, instead, both highly volatile and profoundly ignorant, a flagrantly unfit man who wanted to get his hands on --among other things-- the nuclear launch codes. Now, there’s a thought that, to use biblical vernacular, should scare the hell out of us living here at Ground Zero. Let’s wise up, America. And do it soon.