

Ignorance of science is not a good thing –duh
Ken Olson

Will Rogers said, “Everybody’s ignorant, just on different subjects,” an excellent statement reflecting humility and tolerance. I do not know a hadron from a quark (physics); neither do you, and that’s just fine. However, accurate knowledge of certain subjects should be expected of everyone tasked with making laws for states and nations. How are people qualified to govern if they reject central facts of science and lack a basic understanding of how the world works?

Five decades ago, I stated publicly that if people can be convinced that the earth is a mere 6,000 years old, they will also swallow almost any other blatant falsehood. To be candid, it’s no secret that some politicians court ultra-fundamentalist churches wherein reason is not often celebrated as a gift of God but is seen, instead, as the antithesis of faith. Such groups have felt threatened by the last two centuries of scientific discoveries because they committed to a concept of errorless Scripture and imposed a wooden literalism on Genesis. In so doing, they have become centers of disinformation that promote absurdities.

Montana’s Governor donated some \$290,000 to the “creationist museum” along the Interstate in Glendive, showing not only that he is very rich but also that he might have missed Fifth Grade science. The last of the dinosaurs died out 66 million years ago. However, much as in the old Flintstones cartoon, such places depict people living happily alongside fearsome meat-eating dinosaurs and even maintain, seriously, that “Tyrannosaurus rex actually ate grass.” (!)

US Speaker of the House Johnson says he “governs out of a biblical world view” and is a big fan of the immense theme park in Kentucky that features a 450-foot “Noah’s Ark.” There, the dogma of a young earth is proclaimed and that of T. rex as “grass-eater,” too. Predetermined conclusions construe religion as being opposed to science and vice versa. The ticket booth doesn’t have a sign saying, “Check Your Brains Here,” but should. (You may have noticed stickers on cars promoting that very same anti-science tourist trap.)

Obviously, these people have not read St. Augustine, who wrote 16 centuries ago that being oblivious to varied literary forms and adopting such simple-minded literalism “would cause people to laugh the Bible to scorn,” i.e. to ridicule, malign, and reject it before they even know what it is. In many places, that’s happening right now.

In contrast to such bizarre misconceptions and paranoid denialism regarding evolution, Montana has world-class paleontology studies at The Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman. Beginning in 1988, MSU invited me to accept a non-salaried staff appointment as Research Associate in Paleontology to work with Jack Horner; it was renewed annually for 30 consecutive years. In that capacity, I collected dozens of dinosaur specimens, did some teaching, and was involved in certain interpretive displays (sculptures). It is naïve to think that science and religion, evolution and creation, are incompatible. They simply ask and answer very different questions of How and Why. Can we not walk and chew gum, both?

The type of ignorance referenced here, barely a notch above that of the flat-earthers, has destructive consequences. Charles Pierce commented on societies developing 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. And neither are you.” What we are obligated to do is, first, recognize the extreme danger of putting ignorance in power and, second, speak out against it.

Stupidity is not a virtue, but many on the far-right appear to treat it as such, including politicians who not only tolerate it but exemplify, encourage, and profit from it. Foremost among them is Donald Trump, who is dismantling the Dept. of Education, demonizing universities, and drastically cutting scientific research and staff, even at the National Weather Service and health agencies, dumbing things down.

After all, it is he who suggested that “bleach inside the body” could cure a deadly virus and that wind turbines cause cancer. At rallies, he raged against electric vehicles, asking, “What would happen if an airplane of that type went under a cloud?” --Crash. So, friends, be forewarned: the batteries in your flashlight will not work in the dark!

Thus, in this Age of Science, our president claims to be “a very stable genius” but is, instead, 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, to use the biblical vernacular, that should scare the hell out of us living here at Ground Zero. Let’s wise up, America. And let’s do it soon.

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