
From: Gregory Brown [REDACTED]
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Subject: Greg Brown's Weekend Reading and Other Things.... 2/22/2015

DEAR FRIEND.....

Another Disaster in the Making

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Air pollution, traffic problems, water contamination and earthquakes have occurred in communities near fracking sites.<=p>

The other night I was watching a documentary on the PBS program NOVA about Sinkholes, which is a subject that I knew little to nothing about. I was so blown away that I decided to make it a subject of one of my Weekly Offerings and over the next week or so researched sinkholes. And since one thing often leads to another I came across an article by Lori Montgomery – Oklahoma worries over swarm of earthquakes and connection to oil industry =E2◆◆ based on the dramatic increase of earthquakes in Oklahoma now being attributed to rapid rise of Fracking in the state.

Though mild for the most part the Oklahoma quakes have already caused harm, and not just to people's foundations and swimming pools. Around 11 p.m. on Nov. 5, 2011, a magnitude 5.6 quake — the biggest in state history — hit the small town of Prague, east of Oklahoma City. Sandra Ladra, a business manager for a state-job training center, was sitting in a recliner watching television when the quake toppled her two-story stone fireplace. Big rocks rained down on her legs, gashing her knees.

In August, Ladra filed suit, the first case in Oklahoma to try to pin liability for the quakes to the oil companies — in this case= New Dominion LLC and other producers with disposal wells near Prague. In =ctober, a trial judge dismissed the case, agreeing with New Dominion that Ladra must first go before the Corporation Commission and prove "a scientific basis" for her claim. Last month, in an unusual decision, the Oklahoma Supreme Court agreed to review that ruling. =f

the case goes to trial, Ladra's attorney, Scott Poynter, said he intends to convince a jury that the oil companies are at fault — a potential game-changer, both legally and politically.

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It's not definitive that earthquakes have been caused by fracking wastewater injection. Thus far, the research has lacked data on sub-surface pressure, which is rarely accessible but could take the science further than merely noting correlations between the timing of earthquakes, the timing of wastewater injection, and the location of faults. But it is indisputable that Oklahoma has seen a rise in earthquakes since the fracking boom began. Right now, the state averages about 10 small earthquakes per day. According to the Oklahoma Geological Survey, "[n]o documented cases of induced seismicity have ever come close to the current earthquake rates or the area over which the earthquakes are occurring."

60 Minutes reporter Leslie Stahl once described Natural Gas as "our ugly step-child in the nation's energy debate," as it is now being touted as the answer to our energy problems. What's brought about the change is the process of Hydraulic Fracking or just "Fracking" for extracting natural gas from shale, a dense rock formation one to two miles underground. And if you are sitting on top of it, you might have hit the shale lottery. But if the BP spill and other incidents have taught us anything, exploring for energy has safety risks. But that can get lost in all of the greed and accompanying excitement.

Shale gas is overly abundant in the United States because in the last few years we have discovered the equivalent of two Saudi Arabias of oil in the form of natural gas. Again.... Not one but two.... As a result, drilling for gas is now a fact of life in hundreds of communities in more than thirty states across the country.

Shale formations in the United States as of 2014

Improper and insufficient cement casting can lead to leaks. Poorly constructed casting/tubing can also lead to leaks. Fugitive Methane can also leak along the walls. Low quality concrete allows Fugitive Methane to escape. Fugitive Methane can then follow paths into the aquifer. Fugitive Methane is released dissolving in the aquifer where residential wells pump contaminated water into the house that is then used for drinking, food preparation, cooking, showering, cleaning, irrigation for landscaping, etc. There are a number sources of contamination; neglected surface pumps, unlined storage pits, insufficient or improper castings and new fracture released methane in the form of methane as asphyxiant and/or methane is an explosive hazard. And once this is in the soil and water, it poisons the ground forever.

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The Marcellus Shale deposit (which covers parts of New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia and a bit of Tennessee) contains enough gas to support the US gas needs for 14 years. But as development here can prove to be a catastrophe in the making as toxic chemicals and methane gas seep into the drinking water and now ratio active Radium 226 in waste products. The gas may be booming but what price for people. Hydraulic Fracking or Fracking threatens to destroy the environment and lives... But in the rush to drill concerns about the potential risks of Fracking are being swept aside. Already there are a number of communities in New York and Pennsylvania who can no longer drink their well water due to its contamination caused by fracking wells in the area. Water is a commodity which we often take for granted but when you lose it, it is gone and then you realize how precious water is. In a number of areas people have been told to not drink or bathe in their well water due to the high concentration of contaminants.

Without a doubt the fracking industry is under-regulated. We need to work toward limiting the amount of toxic chemicals to zero. We need to do away with the Halliburton Loophole, which was created in 2005 under Vice President Dick Cheney (former CEO of Halliburton), completely exempted the natural gas industry from regulation under The Safe Drinking Water Act. This should be an outrage. The Vice President advocated for it and pushed Congress to insert it into the language of the bill. Whether it is the technology or human error that is causing the earthquakes and toxic poisoning of the water, land and air in areas where fracking wells are being drilled and operated are the cause, we definitely need more regulation and penalties commensurate to the long-term effects of the damage done. But more importantly the public needs to become aware that there is a possibility that this process could destroy large areas of the country for generations to come which far outweighs the short-term economic gains of today.

Web Link: <http://youtu.be/2qxh7f3WJlc> <<http://youtu.be/2qxh7f3WJlc>> =/p>

When the oil and gas industry came to the small town of Dryden, NY (population: 14,500) with plans to start fracking things didn't turn out quite how they expected. Find out how a group of neighbors turned the tables on a powerful industry — and changed the fracking game forever. See the story on the video through the web link above.

The World's Most Expensive School

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<<http://10=bestschools.ru/wp-content/themes/best/images/gallery/81/rosey.jpg>> =C2◆

Recently the Daily Mail (UK) did a piece on my favorite school in the world, the Institut Le Rosey – under the heading – Inside the world's most expensive school: \$140,000 a year Swiss institute has its own yacht, concert hall and equestrian center and counts royalty among its pupils. Institut Le Rosey commonly referred to as Le Rosey or simply Rosey, is a school near Rolle, Switzerland. The school was founded by Paul-Émile Carnal in 1880 on the site of the 14th-century Château du Rosey near the town of Rolle in the Canton of Vaud. It is one of the oldest boarding schools in Switzerland. The school also owns a campus in the ski resort village of Gstaad in the Canton of Bern, where the student body, faculty, and staff move to during the winter months of January through March. Institut Le Rosey is owned by its fourth generation of Directors, Philippe and Anne Gudin, who assumed ownership of Le Rosey in 1980. Michael Gray is the current Headmaster of the school.

Le Rosey's main campus, near Rolle, is situated on 28 hectares (approximately 70 acres) of landscaped grounds adjacent to Lake Geneva. It is divided into two campuses, one for boys situated on the main campus and one for girls called La Combe. The boarding houses contain a total of 179 bedrooms with en suite bathrooms, and all together the academic buildings contain: 53 classrooms, 8 science laboratories, 14 specially-equipped rooms= 48 apartments for Le Rosey teachers, 2 infirmaries, a library/media centre with about 20'000 to 30'000 literary and reference works, a theatre, 3 dining rooms and 2 cafeterias, an auditorium, 2 gymnasiums, and an ecumenical chapel. </pan>

Sports and arts facilities at Le Rosey include: 10 clay Tennis courts, a 25-meter indoor pool and wellness centre, a 25-meter outdoor pool= 3 football pitches, 1 synthetic rugby pitch, 1 wood chip running track, a shooting and archery range, an open-air theatre, and a computer-regulated greenhouse. Off-campus Le Rosey owns: a private Equestrian center housing 30 horses, 1 indoor riding school, 1 Dressage area, and a clubhouse. Also off-campus is the Le Rosey sailing center equipped with: 10 dinghies, 3 motorboats, 3 yawls and a 38-foot (12 m) yacht. In addition to 13 games and IT rooms students can also use a local 18-hole golf course and karting track.

Le Rosey's 380 students are all boarders= The school offers a demanding bilingual and bicultural education with the language of instruction being French or English depending on the student's academic program. Students must sit either the International Baccalaureate (IB) or French baccalauréat after following an academic program with the chance to take each subject in either English or French, as well as studying one, two or even three further foreign languages. They live in an international community to which each student contributes through his or=her own language, culture and religion; making the campus sort of a global village to share with friends.

To sustain an international atmosphere at Le Rosey, there exists a quota where no more than 10% of the students may come from a single country. The student body, ages 7 through 18, is composed of pupils from approximately 58 different countries, with 60% of the students being European. The school's current enrollment, over 400 pupils, is equally divided between male and female. The majority of students are between the ages of 14 and 18. The Student-teacher ratio is 5:1 with the average class size being less than 10 students, and the average teacher's length of stay at Le Rosey is over 10 years. Students at Le Rosey are nicknamed "Roséens" (in French) or "Roseans" (in English), and former students are labeled "Les Anciens Roséens".

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Notable alumni

With over 5,000 former students, Rosey has one of the most prestigious alumni registries in the world. It has educated generations of dynastic families, including Hohenzollerns, Rothschilds, Metternichs, Borgheses, Hohenlohes, and Radziwiłłs. The school has also famously educated royalty from around the world, including members of the Muhammad Ali Dynasty of Egypt, Alexander, Crown Prince of Yugoslavia, the House of Glücksburg of Greece, and the House of Savoy of Italy. Le Rosey has educated several monarchs, including Aga Khan IV, King Albert II of Belgium, King Baudouin I of Belgium, King Fuad II of Egypt, King Ntare V of Burundi, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Persia, and Prince Rainier III of Monaco. The future Grand Duke of Luxembourg, Prince Guillaume, was also educated at the school.

Famous parents of past students at Le Rosey, who often visited the Rolle and Gstaad campuses, include: Elizabeth Taylor, David Niven, Sir Roger Moore, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Diana Ross, King Leopold III of Belgium, Aristotle Onassis. Rainier III once commented on Le Rosey: "The students were much friendlier because they were from such diverse, international backgrounds. I felt, for once in my childhood, that I could take a breath." Although I never attended Rosey, many of my friends did at one time during a period I went to so many reunions that there are still people who will tell you that I did. But the coolest thing about Rosey is that due to its internationalization and comradery the friends that many of the friends that you make there will be friends for life giving you entrée around the world.

Why We Often Blame The Victim

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How much sympathy you have for this woman probably depends on whether you feel the universe is a just place

I recently came across an interesting article in The Guardian by Oliver Burkeman – believing that life is fair might make you a terrible person – that suggests, faced with injustice, we'll try to alleviate it – but, if we can't, we'll do the next best thing, psychologically speaking: blame the victims of the injustice. The premise of the article is based

on the finding, in a 2009 study, that Holocaust memorials can increase antisemitism. Confronted with an atrocity they otherwise can't explain, people become slightly more likely, on average, to believe that the victims must have brought it on themselves. For example, that last month's commemorations of the liberation of Auschwitz may have marginally increased the prevalence of antisemitism in the modern world, despite being partly intended as a warning against its consequences? Or that reading about the eye-popping state of economic inequality could make you less likely to support politicians who want to do something about it?

These are among numerous unsettling implications of the "just-world hypothesis", a psychological bias explored in a new essay by Nicholas Hune-Brown at Hazlitt. The world, obviously, is a manifestly unjust place: people are always meeting fates they didn't deserve, or not receiving rewards they did deserve for hard work or virtuous behavior. Yet several decades of research have established that our need to believe otherwise runs deep. Faced with evidence of injustice, we'll certainly try to alleviate it if we can – but, if we feel powerless to make things right, we'll do the next best thing, psychologically speaking: we'll convince ourselves that the world isn't so unjust after all.

The classic experiment demonstrating the just-world effect took place in 1966, when Melvyn Lerner and Carolyn Simmons showed people what they claimed were live images of a woman receiving agonizing electric shocks for her poor performance in a memory test. Given the option to alleviate her suffering by ending the shocks, almost everybody did so: humans may be terrible, but most of us don't go around being consciously and deliberately awful. When denied any option to halt her punishment, however – when forced to just sit and watch her apparently suffer – the participants adjusted their opinions of the woman downwards, as if to convince themselves her agony wasn't so indefensible because she wasn't really such an innocent victim. "The sight of an innocent person suffering without possibility of reward or compensation", Lerner and Simmons concluded, "motivated people to devalue the attractiveness of the victim in order to bring about a more appropriate fit between her fate and her character." It's easy to see how a similar psychological process might lead, say, to the belief that victims of sexual assault were asking for it: if you can convince yourself of that, you can avoid acknowledging the horror of the situation.

What's truly unsettling about the just-world bias is that while it can have truly unpleasant effects, these follow from what seems like the entirely understandable urge to believe that things happen for a reason. After all, if we didn't all believe that to some degree, life would be an intolerably chaotic and terrifying nightmare in, which effort and payback were utterly unrelated, and there was no point planning for the future, saving money for retirement or doing anything else in hope of eventual reward. We'd go mad. Surely wanting the world to make a bit more sense than that is eminently forgivable? Yet, ironically, this desire to believe that things happen for a reason leads to the kinds of positions that help entrench injustice instead of reducing it.

Hune-Brown cites another recent bit of evidence for the phenomenon: people with a strong belief in a just world, he reports, are more likely to oppose affirmative action schemes intended to help women or minorities. You needn't be explicitly racist or sexist to hold such views, nor committed to a highly individualistic political position (such as libertarianism); the researchers controlled for those. You need only cling to a conviction that the world is basically fair. That might be a pretty naive position, of course – but it's hard to argue that it's a hateful one. Similar associations have

been found between belief in a just world and a preference for authoritarian political leaders. To shield ourselves psychologically from the terrifying thought that the world is full of innocent people suffering, we endorse politicians and policies more likely to make that suffering worse.

All of which is another reminder of a truth that's too often forgotten in our era of extreme political polarization and 24/7 internet outrage: wrong opinions – even deeply obnoxious opinions – needn't necessarily stem from obnoxious motivations. "Victim-blaming" provides the clearest example: barely a day goes by without some commentator being accused (often rightly) of implying that somebody's suffering was their own fault. That's a viewpoint that should be condemned, of course: it's unquestionably unpleasant to suggest that the victims of, say, the Charlie Hebdo killings, brought their fates upon themselves. But the just-world hypothesis shows how such opinions need not be the consequence of a deep character fault on the part of the blamer, or some tiny kernel of evil in their soul. It might simply result from a strong need to feel that the world remains orderly, and that things still make some kind of sense.

On a personal level, I grew up with the Carwells; Charlie, Billy, Jimmy and Mary who overtime were guests in Otisville, Warwick, Elmira, Green Haven, Hudson, Bedford Hills, Attica and Sing Sing prisons in the State of New York. And although they were degenerate jailbirds they were also often seen as the neighborhood's protectors whom one could call on when someone outside of the neighborhood bullied a resident. But I also remember when once called, Charlie who was the oldest and on parole at the time, surprisingly turned on my friend Raymond demanding to know what had he done to invite the problem. The psychology of blaming the victim is extremely complicated, especially when combined with expectation. How else can one explain blaming the poor for being poor? Or Trayvon Martin for wearing a hoodie? Often we see that when society can't explain why, it is easier to blame the victim.

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Facing the truth – that the world visits violence and poverty and discrimination upon people capriciously, with little regard for what they've done to deserve it – is extremely scary. Because, if there's no good explanation for why any specific person is suffering, it's far harder to escape the frightening conclusion that it could easily be you next.

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The numbers are in as the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan documented 10,548 civilian casualties in 2014, the highest number in a single year since 2009. They include 3,699 civilian deaths, up 25 percent from 2013. The U.N. says the Taliban and other insurgents were responsible for 72 percent of all civilian casualties, with government forces and foreign troops responsible for just 4 percent. The "Taliban don't actually accept the veracity of the information in the report," UNAMA head Nicholas Haysom told journalists Wednesday. "They have accepted in the engagements with us that protection of a civilian is important and have pledged to take certain measures to eradicate civilian casualties."

U.S. and NATO troops pulled back from volatile areas last year, handing security responsibility over to Afghan forces and officially concluding their combat mission at the end of the year. At least 2,211 U.S. soldiers have died in Afghanistan since the invasion to topple the Taliban following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, according to an Associated Press count. The U.N. report attributed the rise in casualties to intensified ground fighting, in which weapons like mortars, rockets and grenades are used in populated areas, sometimes indiscriminately.

For the first time since 2009, more Afghan civilians were killed and injured by ground fighting than by any other tactic, including roadside bombs. The report found that civilian deaths and injuries resulting from ground operations surged by 54 percent, making them the "biggest killers of Afghan women and children in 2014." In southern Kandahar province, a suicide bomber struck near a police station on Wednesday, killing an Afghan woman and a small child, according to Samim Elham, the provincial governor's spokesman. The attack, which happened in Kandahar city, also wounded three civilians, added Elham. And the day that the report was released, a roadside bomb exploded outside of Kabul, killing four members of a family among other incidents. And to suggest that government and foreign forces were "only" responsible for 11% of the casualties plays down we are talking about almost 2000 innocent men, women and children in a unnecessary war now in its fourteenth year.

Do't Believe The Republican Hype About Their Obamacare Replacement
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After nearly five years since the Affordable Care Act became law and two years into its expansion of health coverage to an estimated 10 million uninsured people, GOP lawmakers renewed their efforts to develop a health reform plan they can position as a "replacement" for President Barack Obama's health care law. It's no coincidence that this is taking place in the run-up to a June Supreme Court ruling that could blow a giant hole in the Affordable Care Ac=.

A decision against Obamacare would kick millions of people, mainly living in red states, off their health plans -- and leave them looking to the Republican Congress for a solution.

Congressional Republicans want Americans -- especially the nine on the Supreme Court -- to think the GOP can do in less than five months what it took Democrats decades to achieve: enact comprehensive health care reform legislation. But given that Republicans have been unable to reach consensus on much beyond repealing Obamacare in the last five years, that's an ambitious timeline.♦=A0 This pattern has been repeating itself since 2009. Two weeks ago, House Republicans approved yet another bill (the 56th time) to repeal the Affordable Care Act, and this one included language charging three House committee chairmen with devising a replacement plan.

Meanwhile, Senate Finance Committee Chair Orrin Hatch=(Utah), Sen. Richard Burr (N.C.) and House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Fred Upton (Mich.) unveiled the GOP's latest attempt to construct an Obamacare alternative. Although the proposal is virtually identical to the one that Hatch and Burr issued a year ago with then-Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), the duo -- along with Upton -- scored headlines describing their framework as the Obamacare replacement plan. But remarks from House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) on Thursday underscore how far congressional Republicans are from having an actual alternative in place. "Clearly, our three-chairmen have an awful lot of work to do to come up with our replacement. But I would expect=all of this to be part of the discussion -- all of it. Listen, there's a lot of ideas out there," Boehner said. "The key is going to be to boil those concepts =own to what a real replacement would look like."

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The problem is that their proposal doesn't make things better even if they can get a consensus of support. The Hatch-Burr-Upton proposal is a case study in the difficult trade-offs Republicans would eventually have to negotiate among their members and supporters -- and then defend to the broader public= Relative to Obamacare, the Republican proposal would provide financial assistance to fewer people and cut off aid at a lower income level. It would also roll back Obamacare's Medicaid expansion, replacing it with a tax credit for buying private insurance; eliminate regulations that guarantee all policies include= comprehensive benefits; and, among other things, give insurers more leeway =o vary premiums by age.

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Republicans promote these changes as increasing =E2♦=choice" and "flexibility" in insurance, claiming that they will result in less federal spending and that younger adults will pay lower prices. But each of these proposed changes would carry other consequences as well. Policies without full benefits, including "junk" plans and=mini-med policies, would return to the market. The same pricing practices that reduced premiums for 25-year-olds would jack them up=for 60-year-olds, putting insurance out of reach for many older Americans.♦=A0 And the proposal's precise effect on the uninsured is hard to tell, but under the prevailing assumptions of most forecasting models -- including those used by the Congressional Budget Office -- the likely impact would be more people without insurance and/or much weaker financial protection, as an analysis of last year's plan by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities suggested.

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Republicans will have a hard time defending those changes -- particularly when so many of their constituents now benefit from the Affordable Care Act's more generous assistance and protections. Yet for more conservative Republicans who are bent on full repeal and resistant to increased federal authority over the health care system, the proposal might actually not go far enough. (Last year's plan drew fire from the right for precisely that reason.) The GOP is far from agreement on the question of whether Congress should replace Obamacare with anything at all, in the event the law is repealed legislatively or gutted by the Supreme Court. As a general rule, expanding access to health care reform requires enacting redistributive tax-and social welfare policies -- the kind many conservatives oppose on principle.

To date, none of the GOP health care reform proposals=have so much as made it out of committee. And no Republican in Congress has laid out a plan for advancing any health care bills through the legislative process this year. In 2013, then-House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) couldn't even get a comparatively modest bill funding high-risk pool insurance programs for sick people passed, thanks to a conservative revolt. This week, Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.), who chairs the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, acknowledged to Politico that Republicans might choose not to come together=on a plan at all. Perhaps Alexander realizes that putting together a real Obamacare alternative will take more time -- and more genuine interest -- than Republicans have, or than the Supreme Court's schedule demands. =C2♦ And until Republicans are serious about bettering healthcare in America other than for ideological reasons or to kill on President Obama's signature achievements, PLEASE LEAVE THE AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE ACT LEGISLATION ALONE..... and this is my rant of the week....

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WEEK's READINGS

Study: Too many Americans don't believe in evolution or man-made climate change

A new study published in Science has alarming news about our scientific knowledge

<http://media.salon.com/2014/09/shutte-stock_54359077-620x412.jpg>

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We have to wonder why in a country like ours where inquiry is so celebrated that so many Americans refuse to accept the conclusions of=the scientific community. A new study published in the prestigious journal Science found that Americans are seriously misinformed when it comes to evolution, GMO foods and humanity's role in climate change. The survey, jointly conducted by the Pew Research Center and American Association for the Advancement of Science, compared opinions about scientific matters of the public and AAAS' member scientists.

The results were discouraging. 31 percent of Americans believe that humans have been in "their present form" since their creation, while 24 percent believe that humans evolved but under the guidance of a God-like figure. Only 2 percent of AAAS scientists did not believe in evolution (which is pretty scary in and of itself). Perhaps the most contentious issue the survey touched on was climate change, where only half of the population agreed with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change view that climate change was mostly driven by human activity, such as the burning of fossil fuels. Nearly half said there was either no good evidence for global warming, or that the recent warming of the Earth was due to natural climate variability.

Scientists and the broader public disagreed most strongly about the safety of GM foods, though their views differed substantially on global warming too, with 87% of scientists believing that climate change was mostly caused by human activity. The researchers spoke with 2,002 adults by phone, and used answers to online questionnaires from 3,748 members of the AAAS that live in the U.S. Alan Leshner, the CEO of AAAS and Executive Publisher of *Science* said, "There is a disconnect between the way the public perceives science and the way that scientists see science. Scientists need to do something to turn this around."

Eight in 10 Americans believe science has made life better for most people, but they still don't trust scientists — and/or aren't aware of their consensus — on many of the most important science-related issues of the day. And that goes for far more than just climate change. And it includes plenty of Democrats too. The study comparing the attitudes of scientists and the public shows wide gaps between the two when it comes to climate, food that uses genetically modified organisms and pesticides, research using animals, and also the threat posed by the fast-growing world population.

While 87 percent of scientists in the American Association for the Advancement of Science (the world's biggest scientific society) say climate change is caused by humans, just 50 percent of U.S. adults agree — a 37-point gap. There's an even bigger gap when it comes to GMOs. A similar proportion of scientists say they are safe in food — but just 37 percent of Americans agree. Also bigger than the climate-change gap are the use of animals in research (89 percent of scientists favor it, versus 47 percent of Americans) and using pesticides to produce food (68 percent of scientists, 28 percent of Americans).

On some of these issues, Republicans are more in line with scientists. A similar 2009 Pew study showed 62 percent of Republicans favored using animals in research, versus 48 percent of Democrats. The same study showed a similar split on nuclear power, with 65 percent of scientists favoring it. And on GMOs, past polling has generally shown at least slightly

more concern among Democrats. While Republicans remain more skeptical on top-line issues like evolution and climate change, there has been less partisan difference than one might think on issues like evolution. And on vaccines, the doubters in the two parties have been about equal.

While Republicans have moved more against science's impact on food, both Republicans and Democrats shifted about equally against its impact on the environment. And on basically every measure, Americans are more skeptical of science's impact on American life than they were five years ago. Which doesn't bode well for science — or building political consensus on it. Below please find a web link for a summary of the study

Web Link: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/29/public-and-scientists-views-on-science-and-society/>

Here are The Most Expensive Countries In The World To Live In

You might think life here in America is expensive. But it turns out that when compared to the rest of the world, the U.S. doesn't even make the list of the 20 most expensive countries to live in. Thanks to a new infographic from Movehub, a site that provides information to those looking to move abroad, we can see clearly whose wallets have it worst off. The graphic includes a number of maps showing which nations have the highest cost of living, based on the average price of consumer goods in each country. Above is how the cost of living stacks up worldwide.

Western European countries count among the most expensive places to live. Switzerland's cost of living is highest, barely giving out Norway, a country well-known for being harsh on checkbooks. This close-up map shows how European nations compare to one another:

By contrast, the cost of living in the U.S. is cheaper than at least 20 other countries, including Canada, Australia and the U.K. Here's how North America looks:

Movehub created the maps using data from Numbeo, a website that crowd sources the prices of consumer goods across the globe. Numbeo users submit price data from a variety of sources, including supermarket and taxi company websites, government institutions, press reports and more. The Numbeo data used in Movehub's maps were collected between July 1, 2013 and Jan. 2, 2015, but does not include rent or mortgage payments. Still, as Consumer Reports points out, the number of user submissions on Numbeo varies from country to country, so it's best to take the rankings with a grain of salt. Below are the 15 countries with the highest costs of living, according to Numbeo's data. The living costs in each country are measured against a base of 100, which represents New York City's cost of living. For instance, the data show that living in Switzerland is just over 26% more expensive than living in New York City.

1. Switzerland - 126.03
2. Norway - 118.59
3. Venezuela - 111.01
4. Iceland - 102.14
5. Denmark - 100.60
6. Australia - 99.32
7. New Zealand - 93.71
8. Singapore - 93.61
9. Kuwait - 92.97
10. United Kingdom - 92.19
11. Ireland - 92.09
12. Luxembourg - 91.78
13. Finland - 89.68
14. France - 88.37
15. Belgium - 87.22

For more maps on the cost of living around the world, check out Movehub's full infographic.

We know from study after study that there is a growing educational achievement gap between the poorest and wealthiest children in America. And the Washington Center for Equitable Growth just released a study to identify the lost economic growth and tax revenues caused by this gap. The researchers concluded the United States could ultimately enrich everybody by improving educational performance for the typical student. Because when it comes to math and science scores, the United States lags most of the other 33 advanced industrialized countries that make up the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, ranking 24th, far behind Korea, Poland and Slovenia.

Moving up just a few notches to 19th — so that the average American score matched the O.E.C.D. average — would add 1.7 percent to the nation's gross domestic product over the next 35 years, according to estimates by the Washington Center, a nonpartisan, liberal leaning research group focused on narrowing inequality. That could lead to roughly \$900 billion in higher government revenue, more than making up for the cost of such an effort. If Americans were able to match the scores reached in Canada, which ranks seventh on the O.E.C.D. scale, the United States' gross domestic product would rise by an additional 6.7 percent, a cumulative increase of \$10 trillion (after taking inflation into account) by the year 2050, the report estimated.

In the three decades that followed the end of World War II, almost all Americans, no matter where they fell on the earnings scale, enjoyed at least a doubling of their real incomes. But that balanced growth has evaporated. While those at the top have continued to experience robust income increases, everyone else's income has either stalled or dropped. The average income of the bottom 20 percent of households sank by more than 8 percent from 1973 to 2013, while the inflation adjusted incomes of the top 20 percent grew by about 60 percent, according to the report. The top 5 percent enjoyed an 80 percent jump.

A restoration, then, of the economic growth pattern that characterized the first three post-war decades would result in both greater and more widely shared economic growth—equitable growth. In order to address this key challenge confronting the United States, this study empirically quantifies the economic and tax benefits of raising the educational achievement of children from less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. In general, there are large gaps in the educational outcomes among children from families with lower and higher socioeconomic status. These gaps contribute to subsequent economic inequality, with the relatively poor performance of children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds reducing U.S. economic growth. Thus, closing income or class-based educational gaps would promote faster and more widely shared economic growth.

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The study suggests that the added cost of improving educational achievement at the bottom would be more than made up for by the rise in economic output and tax revenue. The study used math and science scores from the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment, a test widely used around the world for measuring and comparing educational achievement. The average combined score for the United States is 978, while the O.E.C.D. average is 995. The Canadian average is 1,044. Eliminating the achievement gap in America would require raising the country's average to 1,080, so that it would rank third behind South Korea (with an average score of 1,092) and Japan (with a 1,083 average). That stunning improvement, according to the center, would raise the total output in the United States by another 10 percent. Lifetime earnings of the poorest quarter would jump by 22 percent in this event.

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The income gap is an outgrowth, at least in part, of the education gap. An analysis by the O.E.C.D. released last fall showed that the United States greatly lagged nearly every advanced industrial nation on measures of educational equality. Only one in 20 Americans age 25 to 34 surpassed the educational level of their parents, for example. For the 20 richest member nations, that average was one in four. The report includes the types of changes, which include expanding early childhood education, reducing exposure to lead paint and starting school later so teenagers can get more sleep, that the center views as necessary to raise achievement scores, though it does not include specific costs in its calculations.

=span style="font-size:12pt;line-height:107%;font-family:Georgia,serif"><=img src="cid:ii_14b50a2c270dffcc8" alt="Inline image 3" width="472" height="324">

The report also notes how widely achievement scores vary within the United States, not only from state to state but county to county. Montgomery County, a generally affluent suburban area in Maryland just outside of Washington, for example, was able to reduce the gap and increase scores after instituting all-day kindergarten programs, reducing class size, investing in teacher development and reducing housing based segregation in its schools. For more information please feel free to take a look at the attached brief by the Washington Center for Equitable Growth – The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Improving U.S. Educational Outcomes and separately the Fast Facts.

How "Clean" Was Sold to America with Fake Science

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Having grown up in the 1950s where not everyone in my neighborhood had a bath tub and then traveling to Europe for the first time to find that there were public baths in wide use, I found Olga Khazan's article – How Often People in Various Countries Shower – in The Atlantic.... Interesting to say the least. But before I talk about that, in the article I was directed to another article in Gizmodo by Sarah Zhang – How "Clean" Was Sold to America with Fake Science – which I found truly interesting♦=A6.

The average American's daily hygiene ritual would=seem unusual—nay, obsessive—to our forebears a hundred years ago= From mouthwash to deodorant, most of our hygiene products were invented in the past century.=C2◆ To sell them, the advertising industry had to create pseudoscientific maladies like "bad breath" and "body odor." Americans had to be convinced their breath was rotten and theirs armpits stank. It did not happen by accident. "Advertising and toilet soap grew up together,&q=ot; says Katherine Ashenburg, author of *The Dirt on Clean*. As advertising exploded in the early 20th century, so did our obsession with personal hygiene.

Even our very notion of "soap" changed. Until the mid-19th century, "soap" meant laundry soap, the caustic stuff used for scrubbing soiled linens and clothes. A kinder, gentler alternative was invented for cleaning the body, and it had to be called "toilet=soap" to distinguish from the unrefined stuff. Today, "=toilet soap" is a superfluous designation. Toilet soap is simply soap. Advertisers did =ot invent a notion of cleanliness out of a vacuum, but they did cannily tap into anxieties wrought by social upheavals in the early 20th century. As people moved from farm=to factory to office, working spaces became where they spent all day with strangers in closer and closer quarters. Men and women began to work together. Women, especially, were a target of ads playing on the theme, "Often a bridesmaid, never a bride."

And to be sure, advances in science and technology played a role, too. Plumbing made the weekly ritual of a Saturday night, pre-Sabbath bath easy to repeat every night of =he week. Public health campaigns born out of a better understanding of germ theory trumpeted cleanliness. Amidst all this, a new affliction called halitosis descended upon American. You know about it thanks to Listerine, the orchestrator of what maybe be one of the most successful advertising campaigns in history.

How Listerine Made Americans Terrified of Bad Breath

Ads for Listerine touting its various health benefits as an antiseptic. Left: Madison and Madison Ave Collection / Duke University Library. Right: Magazine Art

=p class="MsoNormal">>

There's a reason why Listerine is so nasty ◆=94 it wasn't originally meant to go in your mouth. When Joseph Lawrence invented the alcohol-based liquid in 1879, he created it as disinfectant for surgery. And for the first several decades of Listerine's existence, it was only available to doctors. In 1914, however, the brand's owners, Lambert Pharmacal,

Company decided to introduce Listerine to a wide= audience. The liquid was then sold as a general disinfectant with a whole r=nge of uses from treating dandruff to insect bites, but sales were nothing spectacular. During a brainstorming session, Gerard Lambert dragged in a chemist at the company, who happened to drop a little-known term "halitosis." Here's what happened in Lambert's own words.=/span>

When ask if Listerine was good for bad breath. =e excused himself for a moment and came back with a big book of newspaper clippings. He sat in a chair and I stood=looking over his shoulder. He thumbed through the immense book. "Here it is, Gerard. It says in this clipping from the British Lancet that in cases of halitosis . . ." When asked, "What is halitosis?" "Oh,=quot; he said, "that is the medical term for bad breath." Really? Halitosis lent Listerine the authorit=tive air for a fantastically successful advertising campaign, creating a market =or the novel product of mouthwash. In an early version of A/B testing, coupons were sent out accompanying old and new-style Listerine ads. The halit=sis ads did four times as well. Sales climbed 33 percent in just the first month. From then on, List=ine took out a parade of advertisements insinuating that bad breath was pervasive, but people were simply too polite to tell you. Bad breath I mean halitosis was secretly hol=ing you back, and only Listerine could fix it. Lambert would become the third largest advertiser in major American magazines. The company created the demand for a product Americans did not know they wanted, let alone needed. =nd it's not just bad breath Americans came to fear.

The Ad Man Who Launched His Career With Antiperspirant

James Webb Young, one of the legendary ad men of the =0th century, was still a young copywriter when he got the Odorono account.◆=A0 Odorono was, well, not great. As Sarah Everts describes in a fasc=nating piece in Smithsonian Magazine, the antiperspirant's acid solution had a=nasty habit of eating through clothes, including one woman's wedding dress.=C2◆ A bigger problem, though, was a pervasive belief that blocking sweat was bad for health. To counter that, Young=#39;s first advertisements emphasized Odorono's origins as a formula developed by a doctor. =ut he ran into an even bigger problem, which is that a survey revealed two-thirds of women didn't feel like they nee=ed to use antiperspirant. And here, Young found his true target for selling Odorono: embarrassment. The 1919 ad=in the Ladies Home Journal (above) hit a nerve. Two hundred angry subscribers supposedly canceled their subscriptions because they were so insulted by the ad. But it also worked. Sales for Odorono doubled in the next year. Competitors like Mum (below) ju=ped on the "whisper copy" train, insinuating what people were supposedly too polite to say directly.<=p>

The Cleanliness Institute=/span>

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Early on, the soap makers also realized that advertising could only do so much to differentiate brands —what they really needed to do was band together to convince Americans that cleanliness was paramount. Thus, the Association of American Soap and Glycerine Producers established the friendlier sounding Cleanliness Institute in 1927. The institute could promote keeping clean and, by extension, soap consumption. The industry cannily made school children its primary target. "No approach could better meet the industry's ends than inculcating every youth in America to a tale of soap-and-water. Once habituated to regular and frequent consumption, the children could guarantee a market for years to come," writes Vincent Vinikas in an excellent chapter on the institute from his book *Soft Soap= Hard Sell*.

As one of its first major activities, the institute conducted a study of the hygiene habits of students in 145 schools. They found, by their own standards much room for improvement. Only 57 percent of the schools had soap. "The object should be not merely to make children clean but to make them love to be clean," read an institute report. So the institute set about correcting the course with a flurry of storybooks, teacher's guides, and posters. Teachers were to write letters to parents about the cleanliness. In one case, the institute reported on a school where students were given "wash tickets" after washing their hands. Only by presenting these tickets could they even enter the school cafeteria. The methods may read as heavy-handed today, but the habits promoted by the Cleanliness Institute will be utterly familiar. "The trade association wanted Americans to wash quite unwittingly after toilet, to wash without thought before eating, to jump into the tub as automatically as one might awake each new day," writes Vinikas. That vision is not far from today's reality. If anything, the grooming products deemed essential for proper hygiene have only proliferated. Even a quick stroll through the drugstore —past what seems like infinite varieties of shampoo and deodorant and whatever new product just rolled out of the factories — can tell you that.

At This Moment — With a growing economy, shrinking deficits, bustling industry and booming energy production - We have risen from recession freer to write our own future than any other nation on earth. It's now up to us to choose who we want to be over the next 15 years, and for the decades to come. Will we accept an economy where only a few of us do spectacularly well? Or will we commit ourselves to an economy that generates rising incomes and changes for everyone who makes the effort?

President Obama

2015 State of the Union Address

BEST VIDEO OF =HE WEEK

Most elaborate Airline advertisement ever!

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Web Link:=C2◆ <http://you=u.be/qOw44VFNk8Y> <<http://youtu.be/qOw44VFNk8Y>>

As the official airline of Middle-earth, Air New Zealand has gone all out to celebrate the third and final film in The Hobbit Trilogy =C2◆— The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug. Starring Elijah Wood and Sir Peter Jackson; we're thrilled to unveil The Most Epic Safety Video Ever Made.=C2◆ Please enjoy.....

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THIS WEEK's MUSIC

Elvis

Elvis Aaron Presley (January 8, 1935 – August 16, 1977) was an American singer and actor. Regarded as one of the most significant cultural icons of the 20th century, he is often referred to as "the King of Rock and Roll", or simply, "the King".

Born in Tupelo, Mississippi, when Presley was 13 years old he and his family relocated to Memphis, Tennessee. His music career began there in 1954, when he recorded a song with producer Sam Phillips at Sun Records. Accompanied by

guitarist Scotty Moore and bassist Bill Black, Presley was an early popularizer of rockabilly, an up-tempo, backbeat-driven fusion of country music and rhythm and blues. RCA Victor acquired his contract in a deal arranged by Colonel Tom Parker, who managed the singer for more than two decades. Presley's first RCA single, "Heartbreak Hotel," was released in January 1956 and became a number-one hit in the United States. He was regarded as the leading figure of rock and roll after a series of successful network television appearances and chart-topping records. His energized interpretations of songs and sexually provocative performance style, combined with a singularly potent mix of influences across color lines that coincide with the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement, made him enormously popular and controversial.

In November 1956, he made his film debut in *Love Me Tender*. In 1958, he was drafted into military service. He resumed his recording career two years later, producing some of his most commercially successful work before devoting much of the 1960s to making Hollywood movies and their accompanying soundtrack albums, most of which were critically derided. In 1968, following a seven-year break from live performances, he returned to the stage in the acclaimed televised comeback special *Elvis*, which led to an extended Las Vegas concert residency and a string of highly profitable tours. In 1973, Presley was featured in the first globally broadcast concert via satellite, *Aloha from Hawaii*. Several years of prescription drug abuse severely damaged his health, and he died in 1977 at the age of 42.

Presley is one of the most celebrated and influential musicians of the 20th century. Commercially successful in many genres— including pop, blues and gospel, he is the best-selling solo artist in the history of recorded music, with estimated album sales of around 600 million units worldwide. He was nominated for 14 competitive Grammys and won three, also receiving the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award at age 36, and has been inducted into multiple music halls of fame. Forbes named Elvis Presley as the 2nd top earning dead celebrity with \$55 million as of 2011.

Presley's rise to national attention in 1956 transformed the field of popular music and had a huge effect on the broader scope of popular culture. As the catalyst for the Cultural Revolution that was rock and roll, he was central not only to defining it as a musical genre but in making it a touchstone of youth culture and rebellious attitude. With its racially mixed origins — repeatedly affirmed by Presley — rock and roll's occupation of a central position in mainstream American culture facilitated a new acceptance and appreciation of black culture. In this regard, Little Richard said of Presley, "He was an integrator. Elvis was a blessing. They wouldn't let black music through. He opened the door for black music." Al Green agreed: "He broke the ice for all of us."

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President Jimmy Carter remarked on his legacy in 1977: "His music and his personality, fusing the styles of white country and black rhythm and blues, permanently changed the face of American popular culture. His following was immense, and he was a symbol to people the world over of the vitality, rebelliousness, and good humor of his country." Presley also heralded the vastly expanded reach of celebrity in the era of mass communication: at the age of 21, within a year of his first appearance on American network television, he was one of the most famous people in the world.

Presley's name, image, and voice are instantly recognizable around the globe. He has inspired a legion of impersonators. In polls and surveys, he is recognized as one of the most important popular music artists and influential Americans. "Elvis Presley is the greatest cultural force in the twentieth century", said composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein. "He introduced the beat to everything and he changed everything — music, language, clothes. It's a whole new social revolution — the sixties came from it." Bob Dylan described the sensation of first hearing Presley as "like bursting out of jail".

On the 25th anniversary of Presley's death, The New York Times observed, "All the talentless impersonators and appalling black velvet paintings on display can make him seem little more than a perverse and distant memory. But before Elvis was camp, he was its opposite: a genuine cultural force. Not only Presley's achievements, but his failings as well, are seen by some cultural observers as adding to the power of his legacy, as in this description by Greil Marcus:

Elvis Presley became a supreme figure in American life, one whose presence, no matter how banal or predictable, brooks no real comparisons. ... The cultural range of his music has expanded to the point where it includes not only the hits of the day, but also patriotic recitals, pure country gospel, and really dirty blues. ... Elvis has emerged as a great artist, a great rocker, a great purveyor of schlock, a great heart throb, a great bore, a great symbol of potency, a great ham, a great nice person, and to many a great American. With this I invite you to enjoy the music of The King..... Mr. Elvis Presley.... and definitely listen/watch Angel Wings....

– Suspicious Mind -- C2D http://youtu.be/SBmAPYkPeYU <http://youtu.be/SBmAPYkPeYU>

Elvis Presley – Amazing Grace -- http://youtu.be/B3XdXEJEI4E <http://youtu.be/B3XdXEJEI4E>

Elvis Presley – Always On My Mind --/i> http://youtu.be/u9sRJ-eOHnc <http://youtu.be/u9sRJ-eOHnc>

Elvis Presley C2D – Unchained Melody -- http://youtu.be/uWqax9iHfRU <http://youtu.be/uWqax9iHfRU>

Elvis Presley C2D – My Way -- http://youtu.be/3JxrzO3sNTY <http://youtu.be/3JxrzO3sNTY>

Elvis Presley – Burning Love -- http://youtu.be/DcJac6OykfM <http://youtu.be/DcJac6OykfM>

– Return to Sender --http://youtu.be/Z54-QHEZN6E <http://youtu.be/Z54-QHEZN6E>

Elvis Presley – Jailhouse Rock -- http://youtu.be/gj0Rz-uP4Mk <http://youtu.be/gj0Rz-uP4Mk>

– The Wonder Of You --</> http://youtu.be/MyrQqmc5UT8 <http://youtu.be/MyrQqmc5UT8>

Elvis Presley C2D – Devil in Disguise -- http://youtu.be/m_Q96eJr1k <http://youtu.be/m3_Q96eJr1k>

Elvis Presley – Don't be cruel -- http://youtu.be/YUWMSVDPdGQ <http://youtu.be/YUWMSVDPdGQ>

Elvis Presley C2D – You've Lost That Loving Feeling -- http://youtu.be/e7R5xxDy3QU <http://youtu.be/e7R5xxDy3QU>

Elvis Presley C2D – I Just Can't Help Believing --C2D http://youtu.be/xyKtRoGiNIM <http://youtu.be/xyKtRoGiNIM>

Elv=s Presley – Are You Lonesome Tonight -- <http://youtu.be/mRdQggI2MbM> <<http://youtu.be/mRdQggI2MbM>>

Elvis & Lisa=Marie – Angels Wings -- <http://youtu.be/tikKPQTgjjU>

I hope that you have enjoyed this week's offerings a=d wish you and yours a great week and enjoy the Oscars tonight...

Sincerely,</=>

Greg Brown</=pan>

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