

The Marietta Times

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Daily since 1898

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Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations
The Times is printed with soy-based ink
on paper containing recycled newspaper

OUR OPINION

ALA: Still work to do in Ohio

State lawmakers say the health of Buckeye State residents is important, and in many instances the state is making progress when it comes to fighting poisons such as those found in tobacco products. But on three fronts the American Lung Association says Ohio is failing. The state received F grades on the ALA's annual assessment in the categories of tobacco prevention and cessation funding, tobacco taxes, and flavored tobacco products.

On the other hand, Ohio received an A for smoke-free air and a B for access to smoking cessation services. That's something at least.

But it is hard for lawmakers to go whole hog in fighting tobacco addiction in our state when they consider another factor.

According to Truth Initiative, a nonprofit public health organization, Ohio received an estimated nearly \$1.3 billion in revenue from tobacco settlement payments and tax in fiscal year 2020. The cigarette tax brings in \$1.60 per pack sold. Small cigars are taxed at 37% of wholesale; premium cigars are taxed at either 17% of wholesale or 50 cents per cigar, whichever is lower. All other tobacco products are taxed at 17% of wholesale.

Retailers also must obtain licenses to sell tobacco and e-cigarette products.

The ALA would like Ohio lawmakers to ban flavored tobacco products and e-cigarettes, increase investment in tobacco cessation programs, and implement a cigarette tax equal to the tax on non-cigarette tobacco products. But the group is right to acknowledge the chances of that happening are slim.

"Unfortunately, the current makeup of the Ohio legislature makes it unlikely that efforts to increase tobacco taxes will be successful," the ALA reported.

While many lawmakers may have mixed feelings about taxing an addictive and harmful product to the point of making it impossible for some to afford to continue the habit, it is likely their hesitation comes as much from the thought of lost revenue as it does from an pretense they are worried about imposing upon personal freedoms. After all, they have no qualms about creating laws that inhibit (or prohibit) the sale of other addictive and harmful products.

Ohio has made strides in efforts to reduce the use of tobacco products in the state. But the ALA's report shows there is still quite a bit of work to do.

Time to slay the 'privilege' dragon

Viewpoint

Laura Hollis

It is time to vigorously go on the offensive against those who are selling the deeply deceitful ideology of "privilege" before they tear this country apart.

Although the "privilege" peddlers point to many characteristics that they say create entrenched and undeserved advantage for some in society, one identified most frequently is so-called white privilege.

"White" is a word with constantly shifting definitions. For a long time in this country, "white" designated people whose ethnic origins could be traced to Europe. But the current American definition of "white" (at least among those driving the national conversation) commingles European ethnicities that were not once considered colorminus. Specifically, many northern Europeans were considered "white" at the turn of the 19th century, but the Irish were not. Mediterranean Europeans were not. Nor were Jews or Turks.

That's no longer the case.

The changing racial and ethnic composition of Americans should be seen as good news. People of different European ethnicities are far more likely to intermarry in

the United States than their ancestors would have been in their native countries. And this trend is not limited to Americans of European extraction. According to the 2020 census, more than 10% (33.8 million people) of the U.S. population is now "multiracial." Almost 20% of all marriages are now interracial.

But much of the motivation for the ever changing definition of "white" is tied to craven political objectives, with ominous implications.

For example, Jews — among the most persecuted groups of people in history — are now told that they enjoy "white privilege," whether they identify as "white" or not, even if they are Orthodox (and thus a distinct minority); even if they lost family in or fled the Holocaust. This smacks of thinly veiled antisemitism.

In another notable example, when Trayvon Martin, an 18-year-old Black youth,

was shot and killed in Florida 10 years ago next month, the country was introduced to the term "white Hispanic." George Zimmerman, the man who shot Martin, is multiracial. Zimmerman's father is a native-born American. His mother was born in Peru. But Zimmerman was cast in the media as "white."

In an interview with NPR about why the media was calling Zimmerman "white," sociologist Jean Halley admitted, "Race is not a biological reality; it's a social reality." Halley went further, saying, "Whiteness is something that's a negative. It means not being of color. There's really almost no other definition for it ... Ultimately the only thing that's the real component of whiteness is having privilege."

As California gubernatorial candidate Larry Elder discovered last year, even Black Americans — if they hold conservative political views — can be called "the Black face of white supremacy."

In other words, "white" has long since ceased to be a racial designation and instead became synonymous with any behavior that is reprehensible, and any political viewpoint

that the left disfavors.

Many parents discovered during the COVID-19 lockdowns that "privilege" is being taught in K-12 education, warping our children's perception of themselves and one another in ways that will breed learned helplessness and hatred. Black and Hispanic grade school children are taught that they will be held back by the color of their skin — and that the white children in their classroom are members of the group responsible. White children are told that they are "born racist."

Characteristics other than race/color, but over which children have a similar lack of control, are also being used to intimidate and cow them. A friend recently sent me an "identify your privilege" handout used in the school system where she grew up. These checklists contain items that students are to check off or put tokens on, when any item in the list or one of the boxes describes their circumstances. The more items a child ticks off, the more "privilege" he or she has. The categories in the boxes typically include things such as: "Heterosexual"; "Parents are married"; "Get driven to school";

"Christian"; "No speech impediments"; "Involved in extracurricular activities"; "Never lost a loved one"; "Come from a military family"; "Male."

The absurdity of most of these items should be evident. The overwhelming majority of the human race is heterosexual; it's "privilege" to reproduce the way the species does? Is taking the bus proof that one is somehow disadvantaged in life? I don't know a soul who has never lost a loved one; do "privileged" people not die? Ask any kid from a military family how "privileged" he or she felt to have to move and change schools every few years. And as for being "male," consider recent research that shows that boys are disfavored in elementary and secondary school, their behaviors increasingly pathologized, "diagnosed" and drugged.

There was a time when our culture encouraged behaviors that developed independent individuals and stable families. That attitude has been turned on its ear. The characterization of these behaviors as "privilege" demands that those who have experienced them apologize for them.

READERS' LETTERS

Habitat

Often referred to in terms of the wildlife needs of shelter, water, food, and space, habitat also applies to humans. In ecological terms habitat is often defined as an assemblage of animals and plants that live in a particular environment.

Without proper habitat we will cease to exist, and one irreplaceable component of our habitat is water. Humans have an advantage over the assemblage of animals and plants that coexist and make it possible for us to live. We can normally take contaminated water that would make us extremely ill and filter it and treat it and render it harmless and even make it life sustaining.

I say normally because we usually start out with water that is relatively clean. But the fate of our water supply is constantly under attack from threats from contamination and usually those threats are unforeseen and accidental. We take clean drinking water for granted whereas many parts of the world would be thankful to have our water supply.

To paraphrase a great adage, "With great gifts comes great responsibility" and we are not taking the precautions needed to protect our water. Of the many threats out there, we as humans allow ourselves to remove millions of gallons of perfectly good water from the environment and contaminate it by pumping it under ground through rock fissures (fracking) where it picks up radiation and multitudes of harmful compounds. When this water comes back to the surface it is a biohazard, although the petroleum industry has used its power to avoid that label and instead refers to it as "brine".

Humans are great at problem solving, but when there is financial incentive, it seems that solutions often impact those that are unaware or without the wherewithal to protect themselves. Certainly, the other part of our habitat, the assemblage of animals and plants are powerless to defend themselves.

Apparently the cheapest and easiest disposal method is to inject the



"brine" down wells. This disposal method is fraught with potential for environmental harm, most troubling is the threat of water contamination. These injection wells are drilled to depths well below our drinking water sources, but there are many pathways where the brine can find its way into the water supply. Trucks carrying the "brine" can wreck and spill, pipelines that carry "brine" to the well site can rupture and spill as happened near Marietta last year, injection wells can leak, injection wells under pressure can force "brine" through fissures to unplanned places, etc.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is authorized to provide oversight on these injection wells and delegates that role to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Oil and Gas Resources Management (ODNR). ODNR has regularly failed to complete inspections as required by USEPA and penalties for violations

are rare or absent. Inspection authority should be taken away from ODNR, who receives payment for each barrel of injected "brine". Secondly, if we have not learned anything from the mining industry it's that we should have plenty of revenue set aside for reclamation. Currently, there is no surcharge or tax per barrel of "brine" disposed to go into a fund set aside for when something goes wrong. Perhaps the counties should impose a fee or tax to collect funds for reclamation, although this is a Genie that will be very hard to put back in the bottle.

I hope that we all can continue to take for granted the abundant clean water that we enjoy and the full complement of animals and plants that come with it. Vigilance will be required to ensure that these benefits are protected.

Vic Elam
Marietta

Getting published

The Marietta Times welcomes letters to the editor of general public interest.

To be considered for publication, letters must be no longer than 400 words, and must contain the writer's complete address and phone number. This information will not be published, but is required for verification before publication.

All letters should be written to the editor, and not a third party. The newspaper reserves the right to edit letters for length and content.

Defeat from the jaws of victory?

Viewpoint

Erick Erickson



Things are really bad for the Democrats right now. The stock market has had its worst-performing January since 1929. Inflation is at its highest since 1982. While unemployment is low, businesses are struggling to find workers. Store shelves are empty. Schools are still shuttering. Masks are every where, along with the virus. President Joe Biden's unpopularity is, in some polls, worse than former President Donald Trump's ever was. Republicans are ahead in most generic polls asking "who should control Congress?" They lead on questions of empathy, handling the economy, handling the border and pretty much every issue voters care about. In states like Arizona, incumbent Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly is regularly beaten in polls by generic unnamed Republicans. Midterm elections historically favor the party against the president. Redistricting gives Republicans a slight edge as well.

Things should be good for the GOP.

Never underestimate the Republican Party's ability to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. In Georgia, Biden has a disapproval rating of 61%, according to the Atlanta Journal Constitution's (AJC) polling. Brian Kemp, the incumbent Republican governor, beats Stacey Abrams in multiple public polls. In the AJC's polling, Kemp beats Abrams by a statistically significant seven points.

Unfortunately, Trump hates Kemp. Though the governor is constitutionally prohibited from playing any role in elections, Trump blames Kemp for a supposedly stolen election in Georgia. As a result, Trump convinced for-

mer Sen. David Perdue to run for Kemp's seat. It has fractured the Republican Party.

Perdue claimed he would unite the GOP in Georgia, but he has divided the party with nonstop attacks on Kemp over election integrity. The public polling shows Kemp is having trouble uniting the GOP but would still win the primary. Unfortunately, it will cost him money he could otherwise spend in the general election. Meanwhile, Abrams has a clear path to the Democratic nomination. All the public polling has Perdue, at best, in a statistical tie with Abrams even as Kemp decisively beats her. But Trump intends to interfere for vengeance. In Arizona, while Kelly loses to a generic Republican, the actual Republicans in the race are all having a hard time. The attorney general of Arizona is struggling at fundraising. Others are struggling at credibility. Gov. Doug Ducey might enter the race, but Trump is already ruling on Ducey,

promising to hurt him. Ducey may be the best shot at picking up the Arizona Senate seat and handing control of the Senate to the GOP.

In Ohio, John Mandel and J.D. Vance are both forcefully engaged in performance for Trump's supporters. The race has gotten crowded and the noise of the Republican primary risks luring independent voters to the Democrats. Ohio is a Republican seat they must hold. In Pennsylvania, Trump's pick, Sen. Pat Toomey, dropped out of the race, and TV's Dr. Mehmet Oz joined the race as a Republican. Last week, in a self-filmed clip at a market, Dr. Oz said he had discovered Pennsylvanians were patriotic. It is a sad commentary on a candidate that he only just discovered this about the people he hoped to represent.

Republicans have a shot at sweeping the nation. Between Biden's unpopularity and redistricting, the House of Representatives should be

a sure thing. But the GOP needs the Senate and needs to hold and gain governor's mansions as well. This may be a wave year where even not-great candidates can win. But the former president's interference could risk candidates who are radioactive in the general election. Polling in Georgia shows general election voters are 49% less likely to vote for a candidate Trump supports. That could help Democrats.

The GOP does have one bright spot. Adam Laxalt in Nevada has locked down Republican support across the board. He has the backing of both the Trump wing and non-Trump wing of the party. Catherine Cortez Masto may be the most vulnerable Democrat in the Senate as a result against Laxalt, who has statewide popularity. The GOP has multiple paths to gain the Senate with Democrats on defense. But the GOP has an annoying habit of sabotaging itself.