

TALES FROM THE WASTELAND

I Can Have Crazy Ideas Too!

Humans adapt, even in dystopian universes.

By Barry Perryman, Ph.D.

I was watching an old talk show (circa 1980) on the television a couple of weeks ago and one of the guests was Professor Paul Erhlich, author of “The Population Bomb.” Published in 1968, it became a best seller. In it, Erhlich predicted that with the coming decades of the 1970s and 1980s, there would be a societal upheaval of biblical proportions resulting from wholesale starvation of the human race as a result of overpopulation. “Most of the people who are going to die in the greatest cataclysm in the history of man have already been born. By 1975 some experts feel that food shortages will have escalated the present level of world hunger and starvation into famines of unbelievable proportions. Other experts, more optimistic, think the ultimate food-population collision will not occur until the decade of the 1980s.” It was a wild idea then, and still is, because humans adapt, even in dystopian universes.

Another wild prediction of the time came from University of California-Davis ecologist Kenneth Watt. In April 1970 he gave a presentation where he said: “The world has been chilling sharply for about 20 years. If present trends continue, the world will be about four degrees colder for the global mean temperature in 1990, but 11 degrees colder in the year 2000. This is about twice what it would take to put us into an ice age.”

George Wald, a Nobel Prize-winning professor of physiology at Harvard, made another off-the-chain prediction that same year: “Civilization will end within 15 or 30 years unless immediate action is taken against problems facing mankind.”

At the time, common sense told us that these doomsday predictions were goofy, yet both ideas became the bar that science and reason had to disprove. The global-warming predictions of Al Gore were off the scale as well, yet they formed the impetus for billions of scientific research dollars to be put up for grabs. In my personal experience I can attest that during the last administration, federal grants were generally not awarded for research proposals that did not include or somehow questioned the concept of man-caused global warming. The sensational claims of global alarmists once again became the predictions not to be proved, but to be disproved.

Anymore it seems commonplace for the most outlandish idea to become the standard

unit of measurement. Whoever has the craziest, most off-the-wall idea goes straight to the front of the line, and everybody with a modicum of common sense has to mobilize in order to keep the thing in check. The majority leader in the California Assembly just intro-

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duced a *plastic straws upon request* bill that would *criminalize* and punish wait staff who provide plastic straws to patrons who do not specifically ask for them! Now I know that plastic disposal is a real global problem, but wouldn't it make better sense for individual municipalities to require old-timey paper

straws or just eliminate them altogether?

¡Ay caramba!

Most of the time, I'm like Curly Howard of the Three Stooges. I try to think, but nothing happens. However, not to be outdone here in the

wasteland, I have a couple of crazy ideas too. Society in general has deemed social media a cesspool of cyber-bullying for our K-12 aged kiddos. Well, we restrict our children from purchasing tobacco, alcohol, and firearms until they reach legal maturity for good reason. We also have age-limit eligibility requirements for certain types of driver licenses, mortgages, medical treatments, and the right to vote. Why can't we put a legal age requirement on social media accounts? At least then, they would have to bully each other old-school style.

Here's one that is really off the chain. As of this month the National Debt Clock says the U.S. national debt is about \$20.8 trillion. Let us as a nation challenge the congressional staffers in D.C. (not Congress, but the underpaid 25- to 30-year-olds) to come up with a workable plan to cut the debt by 50 percent within 10 years, and compensate them by dividing five percent of the savings equally among them. There are about 6,000 staffers in D.C. who would then receive about \$83 million each. I believe that might fire up some out-of-the-box thinking about what and where we could cut some of our expenditures and maybe how to generate additional revenues without raising taxes.

I outlandishly predict that both of these crazy ideas will work. Why can't they be the bar of disapproval? Now keep in mind that I used to think email was a yuppie fad and there were little diaper-wearing babies inside your hollow foot who poked you with bent fishhooks when your foot fell asleep. (I am sure some of you are now feeling sympathy for my wife.) I have since learned that there are no diaper-wearing babies with fishhooks living inside our feet, but you can imagine the shock I felt upon that revelation. I am now tempted to say I'm not crazy, but there are some who would argue. ■

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