

Reflections

Some say ice — Sunspots normally peak and ebb on an 11-year cycle. But shortly after astronomers started keeping track of them in the early 1600s, the sun virtually stopped producing sunspots for a period of about 70 years. That period is known as the Maunder Minimum. Coincidentally, the Little Ice Age occurred during this lull.

Recently the sun has once again virtually stopped producing sunspots. I am not qualified to predict whether we are headed for another minimum, and I'm not qualified to say whether sunspots affect earth's global temperatures (although the evidence looks pretty good to me), but I am rooting for Little Ice Age II, for two reasons.

First, I don't want to see cities at low elevations devastated by rising oceans produced by melting ice. Second, I'd love to hear Nobel Laureate Al Gore's explanation of why the heating bill for his mansion continues to climb. — Jeff Wrobel

Hard numbers — The company that created and administers the ACT college admissions test has just released the 2009 analysis of the nationwide results, and they are not encouraging.

The results show that while 67% of high school graduates are college-ready in English, only 53% are college-ready in reading, less than half (42%, to be exact) are college-ready in math, and less than a third (28%) are college-ready in science. In fact, less than a quarter (23%) are college-ready in all four areas.

This is about high school grads, please note. It doesn't consider dropouts, who constitute a large percentage of students in most large public school districts. Nor does it consider high school grads who don't take college admission tests, either because they are going straight into the work force or are going to junior college or trade schools.

The results are essentially the same as for last year (when only 22% of the test takers were college ready in all four areas).

Considering that the sample size here is large — about 1.48 million out of the 3.3 million eligible high school students (usually juniors) took the test — it is clear that our educational crisis continues.

Indeed, the figures are so disappointing that Bob White, head of the nonpartisan Alliance for Excellent Education, was moved to opine, "We're not making the progress we need to be making. The only way you improve these numbers and get

them higher is by improving your secondary schools." Really, ya think?

But improving secondary schools requires more school choice, something Obama and the Democrats in Congress staunchly oppose. In fact, the only major educational initiative that these union-controlled hacks have taken was to kill the DC voucher program.

You can expect the primary and secondary educational system in America to continue to rot for years. — Gary Jason

Gunfight — The controversy about carrying guns in public is not new. In 1967, however, the political alignments on this issue were completely different. Many conservatives (and others) objected when the Black Panthers insisted on exercising this right in California. In response, Gov. Ronald Reagan signed the Mulford Act banning the carrying of guns in public.

Many defenders of liberty have felt the need reflexively to defend the gun-toting citizens who have recently appeared at rallies. This is a mistake, or at least an incomplete response. A far more productive contribution to an otherwise futile debate is to emphasize privatization as a solution. We can find a just and efficient answer to the question only by treating this as a tragedy-of-the-commons issue.

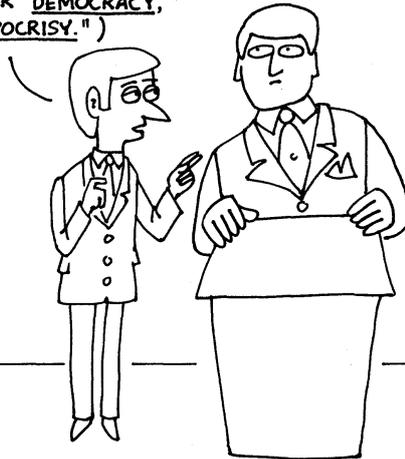
Both sides have a point, but neither can ever be satisfied as long as thoroughfares, parks, and other venues for town halls or rallies continue to be government owned. When a venue is privately owned, the issue becomes a relatively simple one: the owner decides who can carry guns. The problem (to the extent it is a problem) arises only when we take

private property out of the equation. In the absence of privatization, the controversy will never end until one side or the other forces its will over the commons through the brute force of legislation. — David Beito

Turnabout is foul play — No matter how much I try, I just can't get excited about the Republicans in Congress opposing Obama's healthcare reforms. Sure, they have correctly said it is too expensive and too socialistic. But like the proverbial pot calling the kettle black, the Republicans are hypocrites, as well as big spenders who frequently support socialist legislation, when it is their own.

How quickly conservatives forget that it was Republicans in 2003 that gave us the Medicare Prescription Drug,

(SIR, IT'S "DEMOCRACY,
SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY,"
NOT "HYPOCRISY.")



SHCHAMBERS

Improvement, and Modernization Act (PL 108-173). Initially projected to cost about \$400 billion (which is still \$400 billion too much), it is now projected to cost over a trillion dollars.

Introduced on June 25, 2003, by the Republican House Speaker Dennis Hastert and supported by the Republican House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, this reform and modernization of Medicare passed the House (220–215) and the Senate (54–44) in late 2003 with overwhelming Republican support. In fact, it was Democrats who almost defeated this massive expansion of the welfare state. Only nine Republicans in the Senate and 25 in the House voted against healthcare reform in 2003.

Why are the Republicans en masse opposed to healthcare in 2009? Have the Republicans become libertarians, or are they partisan hypocrites without any real allegiance to the Constitution or the principles of liberty and limited government? I'm afraid it's the latter. — Laurence M. Vance

Health is in the eye of the beholder — Overhauling the U.S. medical system will do absolutely nothing to improve the health of the population. American medicine is extremely good for acute problems and diseases, but when it comes to health maintenance, it's next to useless.

Michael Moore, who is physically obese, intellectually dishonest, and philosophically unsound (what a pathetic combination — he should run for Congress), made the argument in his ridiculous movie that the average Cuban is healthier than the average American. That's correct, but it has absolutely nothing to do with the healthcare system. The average

Cuban isn't healthier than the average American because his healthcare system is better. It's a horrible, primitive healthcare system. The technology stopped advancing there back in 1960, and the doctors stopped learning new things in that year. Nothing has changed since 1960. But the average Cuban is in much better health than the average American.

There are two reasons for that: he gets a lot more exercise than the average American, and he has a much better diet, which is to say that he eats far fewer calories (and they are unrefined calories).

When things change in Cuba, so they have a diet like that of the average American and the same kind of transportation as the average American, the average Cuban will be in much worse shape.

People conflate the health of a population with a country's medical system, when these things really have almost nothing to do with each other. — Doug Casey

Childishness — The handsome moron Van Jones resigned his job as Obama's "green jobs czar" (technically, part of the White House Council on Environmental Quality). Jones had, in years passed, reportedly signed a "truther" document alleging that George W. Bush had orchestrated the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, DC. He had also called all Republicans "assholes."

Jones's explanation for his resignation didn't make much sense. He said that his critics used "lies and distortions" to attack him; yet he legitimized their complaints by quitting. The New York Times had to twist its prose into logic-defying

Word Watch

by Stephen Cox

I don't know — why can't people care about the words they say and write? Don't they have any self-respect?

Mary Chesnut, the diarist of the Confederacy, wondered the same thing:

"I saw a letter from a girl crossed in love. It was shown to me and my advice asked. Her parents object to the social position of her fiancé, in point of fact forbid the banns. She writes, 'I am *missereable*.' Her sister she calls a 'mean retch.'

For such a speller I said a man of any social status would do. They ought not to expect so much for her. If she wrote her 'pah' a note, I am sure that 'stern parient' would give in."

A "mean retch"! You have to give the girl credit — what a triumph of illiteracy!

Mrs. Chesnut adds, "I am miserable, too, today — with one s and one l." If she were here now, I'm sure she would share my own misery about the weird assemblages of letters and syllables that virtually everyone, from college professors to girls crossed in love, now accepts as words, decent and ordinary:

"Alright" ("all right" had too many letters).

"Thusly" ("thus" had too few).

"Deplane": "in the unlikely event of a water landing, passengers will deplane through the side-door exits" ("leave," apparently, had too few syllables).

"Detrain" (the inevitable result of "deplane").

"Pre-approve": "you are now pre-approved for credit" (the

actual approval will come two seconds before the crack of doom).

"Input": "please give me your input" (but why ask? — "input" is something, I assume, that I am required to give, whenever some computer bureaucrat inserts my plug in a socket, switches me on, and logs onto my brain; "input" is nothing like the old-fashioned "advice," which implied a human aspect).

That's ugly. But do people ever reflect on the weird things their words imply? Or on the nonsense that their words state directly?

Here's an account of John Steinbeck's involvement with movies. It says he provided "interesting introductions to several filmed adaptations of short stories by the legendary writer O. Henry." All right; now tell me, what are the *legends* of O. Henry? Was he the assassin of Jesse James? Or was he the guy who discovered the Holy Grail? But maybe I should be grateful that the writer didn't call him "infamous."

Of course, there are Americans who are oblivious to what they say, not on the small scale but on the grand scale. Our vice president is a fine example. In late July he gave an interview to The Wall Street Journal in which he remarked derisively on the deficiencies of the Russian political-economic zeitgeist: "They have a shrinking population base, they have a withering economy, they have a banking sector and structure that is not likely to be able to withstand the next 15 years [Wait! Is he talking about them or us?], they're in a situation where the world is changing