



Free Press Viewpoint

Good or bad, DNA tests coming

Scientists say they're on the verge of opening up a whole new world of DNA testing, promising to tell parents more, perhaps, than they need to know about their budding offspring well before birth.

The question everyone is asking, from doctors and scientists to theologians and ethicists, is whether this is even a good thing.

The Associated Press reports that scientists feel they can scan fetal DNA from a mother's blood, a technique which could be invaluable in predicting possible genetic problems and diseases.

"It's without question a major medical advance that promises to greatly improve current prenatal care," said Jaime King, a University of California law professor who studies the field, adding: "It raises significant practical, legal, ethical and social challenges."

Along with the benefits come some heavy baggage. Doctors might be able to predict everything from eye and hair color to height and the risk of developing diseases such as Alzheimer's. Experts wonder whether people might use this information to pick "designer" children, abandoning others.

In the view of many conservatives, both ethicists and ministers, that knowledge could be dangerous. Some wonder if parents could get "too much information." They might withhold commitment to a baby until they knew it was "good enough" to be born.

But who would decide what parents should and shouldn't know? Don't they have a right to decide that for themselves?

History shows us that science advances no matter what men think. And often, we fear any new advance, from the end of the flat-world theory to the dawn of the nuclear age. But just as jailing Galileo did not make the earth the center of the universe, so restricting information that people might want won't keep things from changing.

While new information won't change the debate we see today, it may reframe the references. Some will demand new laws. Others will demand new information. The country, the world will be divided over what is right and what is wrong.

But as today, science will have to leave decisions on those questions to the church and the philosophers. People need to be educated about their choices, but in the end, each of us will have to make our own.

The information is going to be available, whether we like it or not. The church can and should teach us what is right and wrong. That is the church's job, not the scientist's. Science can only tell us what is possible.

And, for better or for worse, it will. — Steve Haynes

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U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

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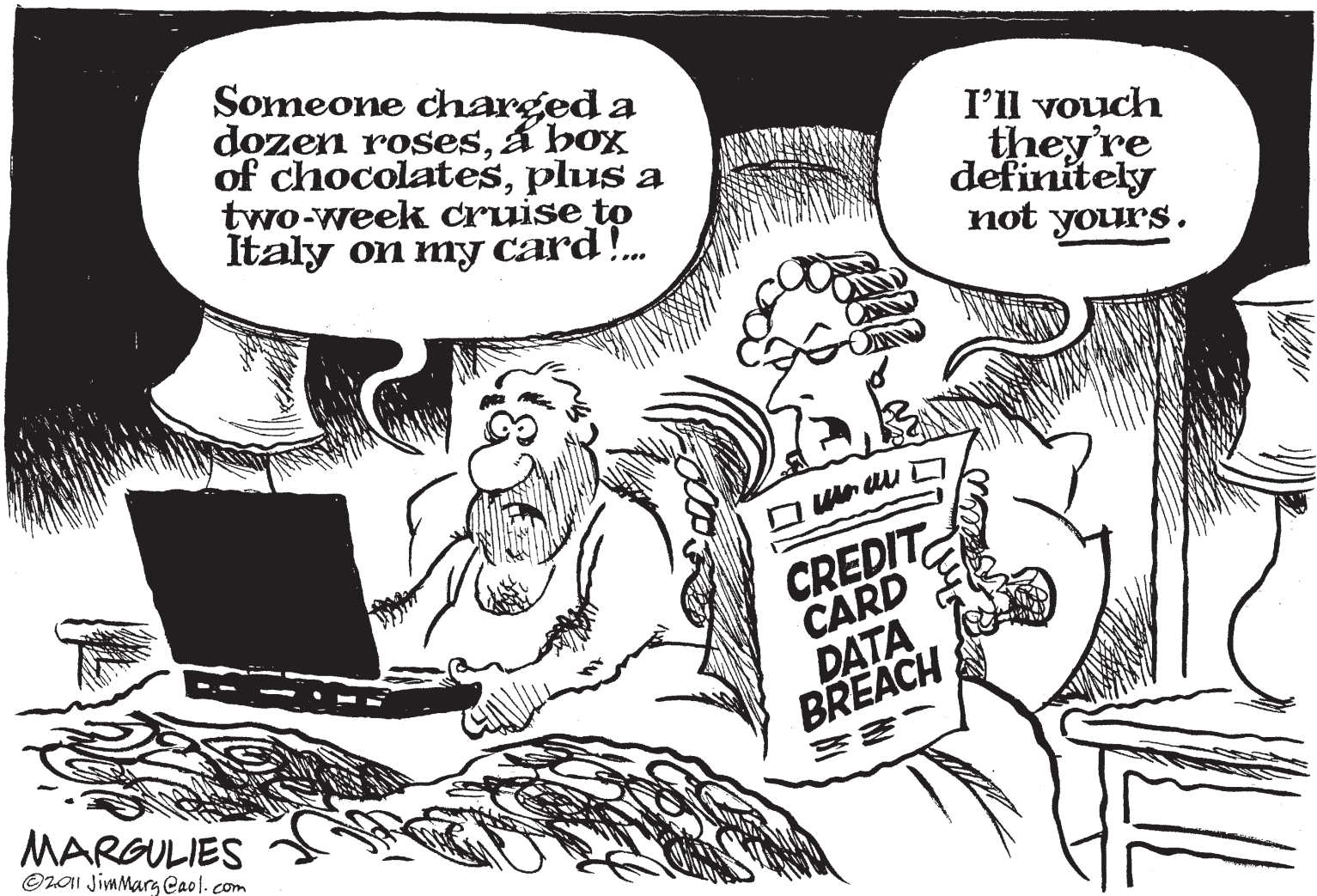
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Gilded Age fun to visit, but home's nicer

Newport, R.I., was the summer retreat for the rich, famous and ambitious back in America's Gilded Age — that time after the Civil War and before the World War I, when fortunes were amassed and spent in wild abandon.

We were about as far from Kansas as ruby slippers or Amtrak could take us. In fact, a little farther. We had to drive the last few miles.

We were in a land where the sea meets the sky and trees are everywhere.

Each summer, the National Newspaper Association goes somewhere, picked by the president, for a board meeting. We've been to Mackinac Island, Mich.; Santa Fe, N.M.; Omaha; the Black Hills of South Dakota; and Las Vegas, Nev., where the temperature was 115 degrees.

This year's president is from New Jersey, and her mother and sister own and run a vineyard and winery near Newport. She wanted to show us this beautiful area.

To get there, you can fly to Boston or Providence, R.I., and drive out to the island.

Or you can take the train.

We got on the California Zephyr about midnight in McCook and headed east. At Chicago, we changed to the Capital Limited for Washington. In D.C., we changed again catching a fast train up the coast to Boston, where we rented a car and headed down the freeway.

In Newport, our hotel was beautiful. The Viking is a majestic old hotel, built in the 1920s in a spate of community pride and boosterism. It's on the National Register of Historic places, an elegant old lady.

The itinerary included visits to two Newport mansions built by heirs to the Vanderbilt railroad fortune, a visit to the vineyard and a tour of the Tennis Hall of Fame.



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

Last summer, our trip to Mackinac Island had shown us how the rich of Detroit got out of the city during the hot summer months and enjoyed an opulent lifestyle by Lake Huron. Newport was another peek into the life of the super rich in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The post-Civil War boom had made several New Yorkers immense fortunes as the country turned its attention to growth. Those who developed cutting-edge technology — railroads, in this case — could make a lot of money, just as Internet pioneers do today.

Many of these mega-rich built summer palaces on the beautiful shores of Newport.

First we visited Marble House, built between 1888 and 1892 for William K. and Alva Vanderbilt.

This summer cottage, as its name implies, is made almost entirely of imported marble and is supposed to look like a small piece of the Palace of Versailles transported from France to the U.S. One room is completely covered — ceiling and walls — in gold leaf. Talk about your conspicuous consumption.

The place looks hard and cold, and since Alva divorced ol' Wille, kept the house and married his best friend a few years later, I'm thinking maybe it wasn't a happy home.

The other house we visited was the Breakers,

the crown jewel of historic Newport homes. Built by Cornelius Vanderbilt II between 1893 and 1895, the Breakers is enormous.

With 70 rooms and huge gardens, calling this place a summer cottage is like calling the White House a hut on the Potomac.

However, the Breakers, for all its huge size and fanciness, seemed to have been a happier home to this pair of Vanderbilts and their seven children.

The bottom floor comprises the public rooms — entry hall, drawing room, dining room and so forth, plus a kitchen and pantry.

The next two floors contain the bedrooms for family and friends. Each two bedrooms share a bath, which contains a marble tub with four taps — for hot and cold running fresh and sea water.

It is said that each bath had to be drawn twice: once to heat up the marble tub and a second time for the bath.

These semi-private baths were an incredible luxury in a "summer cottage," where even the fanciest usually only contained one or maybe two bathrooms.

The top floor of the mansion housed the army of servants it took to run the place.

The whole thing was a marvel and we came away a little overwhelmed.

It's fun to see how other people lived, but it was great to get home again, where the worn old porcelain tub doesn't require twice filling and had only two settings — hot and cold.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

What's really the matter with Kansas

A May 22 story in the *Wichita Eagle* about the lack of focus on job creation in the just-concluded legislative session provides great insight into the economic stagnation the state has suffered over the last decade.

According to the Kansas Dept. of Labor, between April 2008 and April 2011 we lost 73,200 private sector jobs (6.5 percent), 500 state government jobs (0.9 percent) and 500 local government jobs (0.3 percent). Last year, despite warnings from two academic studies that a sales tax increase would cost thousands of jobs, legislators did it anyway — and sure enough, between July 1 and April 30 we lost 5,000 private sector jobs (seasonally adjusted according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics for comparability). State government employment didn't change over the time frame.

So what was the focus of that lengthy article? The loss of government jobs. Private sector jobs were barely mentioned.

The *Eagle* article spoke of a large number of state job cuts without mentioning that the majority were vacant positions. But there was no mention of last year's legislative action that destroyed private sector jobs by raising the sales tax so government could spend more money.

That pretty much sums up the job problem in Kansas for the last decade: more concern about protecting government and not much more than lip service for the private sector.

The article painted a dire picture for education but failed to mention that total state

Other Opinions

• Dave Trabert
Kansas Policy Institute

spending on public schools will increase by more than \$100 million next year. Mandatory spending increases on school employee retirement benefits, special education and school bond payments prompted a reduction in the starting point of the funding formula (base state aid) but legislators also passed a law allowing districts to make up the difference in base state aid.

Districts are allowed to transfer carryover cash balances from a variety of funds for operational purposes — and all but one district started this year with enough money in those funds to do so. Most, in fact, had more than \$1,000 per-pupil in those funds. Districts have the ability to avoid the layoffs mentioned in this article, so why did the author and those interviewed fail to mention it?

There was also no perspective placed on the education jobs that local school boards chose to eliminate. Current employment levels are still considerably higher than just a few years ago. Statewide there are 4.6 percent more teachers than in 2005 and all other school

employment is 8.6 percent higher; enrollment is up just 3.1 percent. It's a shame that those people lost their jobs but it would be nice to see just as much concern for the private sector unemployed.

The Rural Opportunity Zones created by the Legislature are a good step forward but the change that would create more jobs than any other effort — eventually eliminating the income tax — was killed in the Senate. They wouldn't even allow it to be discussed. Opponents of eliminating the income tax are very concerned about sustaining government.

Kansas will continue to suffer the economic stagnation we've seen over the last decade until we stop valuing government jobs over private sector jobs. That's what is really the matter with Kansas.

Dave Trabert President of Kansas Policy Institute, researches and writes on fiscal policy and education issues. He graduated from West Liberty State College with a degree in business administration.

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Mallard Fillmore

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