

from our viewpoint...

Our experiment far from being done

The fireworks are over, the picnic eaten, the boat put away. America is back to work today.

Our country is another year older, marking its 235th birthday on Monday.

Back at the office, the field, the highway, the Legislature, we face the same old problems: not enough money, too many needs, too many demands, too much poverty, schools that do only part of what we want them to do, roads with too many potholes and not enough lanes.

The list is endless.

Are we right to celebrate our country?

It was, and is, a grand experiment. When the Founding Fathers wrote the Declaration of Independence, no nation on the face of the Earth held out the ideals of democracy and self-government, of freedom and liberty, they proclaimed.

Men were ruled by kings and despots. Brief flirtations with self-rule by Greeks and Romans were but footnotes to history.

Yet, English noblemen and European thinkers had begun to articulate a higher standard. The English, still subject to the will of the king, had won certain rights. Philosophers wrote about the "natural" rights of man.

But our forbears, led by the pen of Thomas Jefferson, took this a step or two further. They declared the "inalienable" rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" granted to men by "Nature and Nature's God."

Having declared Independence from the English king, fought for and won it, they set about creating a nation founded on those principles. It was not easy, nor did it come quickly.

Even the Constitutional Convention, which gave us a framework for government, did not address our rights as humans. That was left to a group of Virginians concerned that the new governments would become so strong they would oppress us, even as the king had.

They gave us the example of a Bill of Rights, later adopted into the federal Constitution, to limit the authority of our government. That was a key concept. The Bill guaranteed our liberty, from the right to bear arms to the right to a speedy trial when accused by the government.

The First Amendment alone is a marvel of spare and efficient language. In just 45 words, it gave us the rights to free speech, a free press, to worship, to assemble and protest, and to petition our government.

And so we began our grand experiment under a system like no other.

Perfect? Far from it.

The Declaration, with its high ideals of freedom, came from the pen of Jefferson, who owned slaves. The Constitution, as the Founders understood it, granted rights only to free white men.

We'd have to fight a Civil War to settle the issues of slavery and secession. It'd be another century before we began to address the second-class status of blacks and other minorities, of women and others.

We've come a long ways since then. We're a better country now than 50 years ago, but still not perfect. So many problems to solve; so many things not even our government can fix.

And yet, our ideals remain so much higher. If you made the argument we have the best system on Earth, who would disagree? We just need to keep making it better.

Happy Birthday, America. — Steve Haynes

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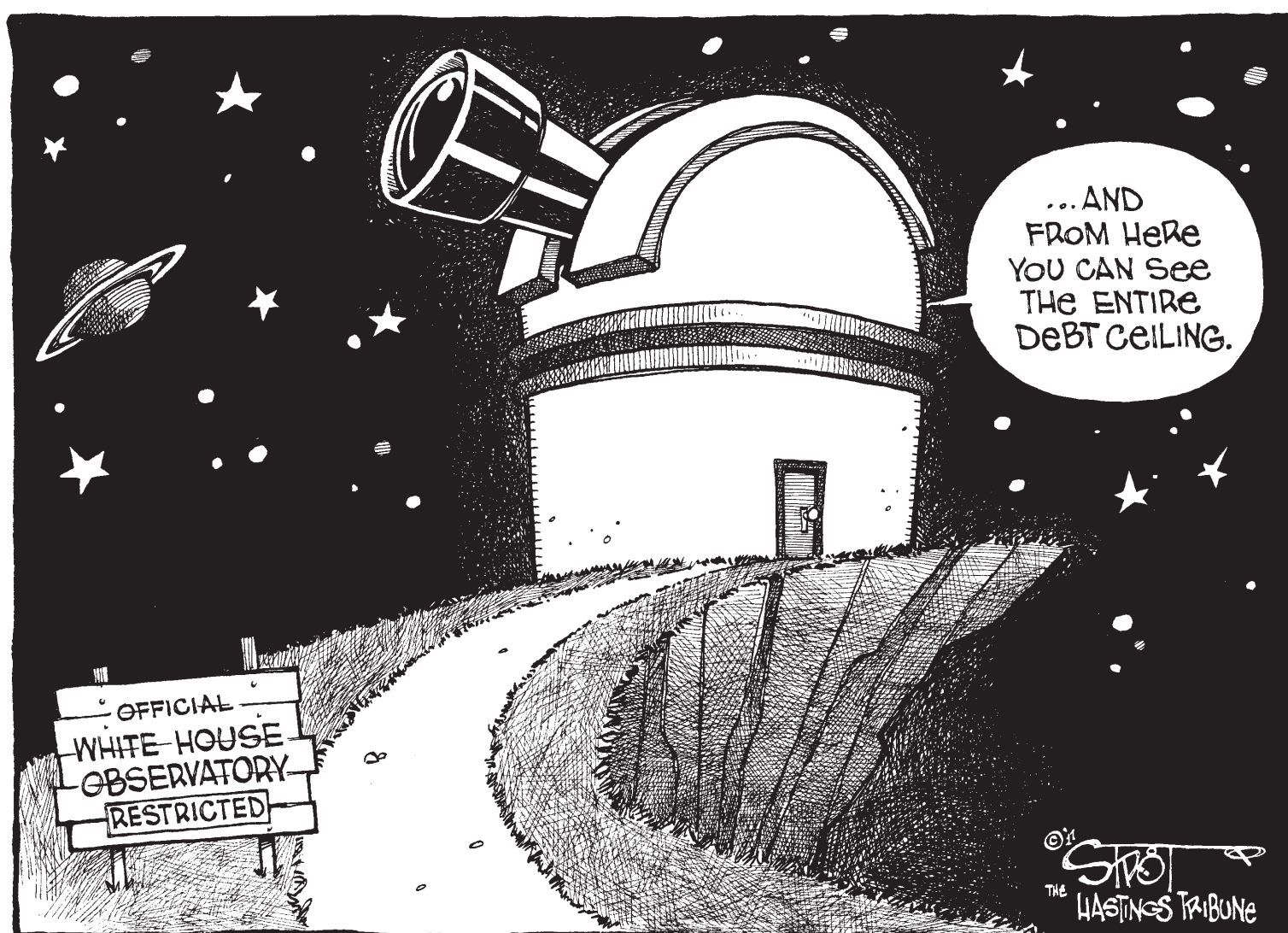
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Pools were more than swimming holes

This 'Man of the Plains' can well remember when public swimming pools were more than just a place in which to swim.

In my days as a youngster, the public pool in our area of town was drained once a week, then thoroughly cleaned and refilled over the weekend for another week of fun and whatever else might take place.

"Whatever else might take place?" you might ask.

Well, yes, kids being kids they found it more convenient to answer mother nature's call in the pool rather than to get out and head for the small wooden huts near the pool. Those huts were designed to allow swimmers to change from street wear to swim wear and to use the bathrooms provided to rid themselves of water that badly needed to exit their bodies.

You get the picture.

Mondays through Wednesdays were the best days to swim because the refill was able to withstand, to some degree, the urge of the wild. But when you figure in Thursdays and Fridays - wow! - the water began to take on a real cloudy look, much like the clouds overhead preparing to drop rain.

You could always spot the kids in the midst of doing something in the pool they knew they shouldn't be doing. They would simply stand there quietly with hands on their hips and wearing a grin that in itself was like broadcasting the action taking place.

But we were fortunate to have that swim pool in our neighborhood.

On occasion, we would make use of the much larger municipal swimming pool in the southern part of the community. That was the crown jewel! Clear, crisp, running water, a slipper slide within the pool itself, and two levels of diving boards.



tom dreiling

• man of the plains

A fancy tan-colored stone building allowed you to change into your swimsuit in two large rooms equipped with stalls. Stalls? Boy, that was really uptown!

Additionally, the municipal pool had a snack area atop the building that sold potato chips, ice cream, candy, pop, etc. Sometimes they even had dances on Saturday nights.

We didn't use that pool much because there was a charge to get in. And money then, much like now, wasn't always available.

Fast forward! Today, many public swim pools are equipped with all sorts of attractions, designed to keep the swimmers entertained. They also attract many non-swimmers who just enjoy taking in the carnival atmosphere. I honestly have no idea what some of that stuff is for.

But despite the state-of-the-art design, these newer pools still have one thing in common with the swimming pools I remember as a youngster. Yes, if you look around the pool, you will spot a child or two quietly standing there with hands on their hips and a grin on their face broadcasting the action taking place.

Some things never change!

Politically speaking...

Let's get our second little Straw Poll into the mix. Simply e-mail me who you think will get the Republican nomination at this point in the campaign. That's all there is to it. My address is milehitom@hotmail.com.

Ahh, I see where Kansas increased its speed limits on the interstates from 70 miles per hour to 75. That's good news for east-bound Coloradans who now won't have to slow up when entering the Sunflower State and westbound Kansans won't have to speed up when moving onto Colorado's turf. (As if that ever took place.)

Snippets

"As for Hays' Kennedy Middle School, there are enough Catholic families to support a K through/junior high school. That would also tie in well with TMP's recruiting program and give the community an option of Catholic education from K-12. ..."

"... Thanks for using yourself as an example for when it's time to get out from behind the wheel. ... We are facing that problem and will use your suggestions."

"We've tried everything with my husband's folks to give it up. They looked at us like we lost our minds. ... My husband told them if they don't quit driving, he will for fear he just might be a victim of their stubbornness. ..."

"Our 17 year old said he will drive his grand-father wherever he needs to go if he gives up driving. Grandpa reluctantly agreed under one condition: that they use his car. A small victory, I guess. ..."

Snippets to milehitom@hotmail.com.

Have a great day!

Tom Dreiling is a retired journalist, now living in Aurora, Colo. He edited and published newspapers in Kansas and Wyoming during his 44-year career. E-mail is milehitom@hotmail.com

Climate change: follow the scientists

Dr. James McClintock, a renowned University of Alabama-Birmingham marine biologist who has conducted research in Antarctica for more than 25 years, told me the following story.

"You work in a scientific lab in the quietest place on Earth - Antarctica.

"There's a Crack! Boom!

"You rush to the window of your remote lab with a number of your fellow scientists, and you witness a glacier 'calving' a chunk of ice the size of a house into the water. Adrenaline permeates the room.

"Ten years ago, that exciting and incredible sight would happen about once a week. It was an event. Something rare.

"Today, at that same lab in Antarctica, the calving glacial ice, the explosive sounds, are a daily occurrence.

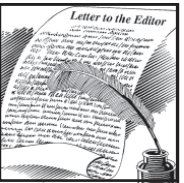
"The scientists are almost 'ho-hum' about it, barely lifting their heads to recognize the melting ice."

Such is life in a warming world.

McClintock has spent most of his life searching the ends of the earth for a cure for cancer and other human diseases. In fact, his research team has discovered marine species in the Antarctic that produce compounds active against skin cancer and influenza.

McClintock is not an alarmist. He does not have a political agenda. But he knows firsthand the earth is warming and he understands some of the consequences. Mid-winter temperatures on the Antarctic Peninsula where he works are 10 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than they were 60 years ago. That may not seem like a big difference to us non-scientists, but it's devastating to a delicate polar ecosystem (and other ecosystems).

In fact, this spring, McClintock and his research associates documented an invasion of king crabs that are likely to endanger fragile



from other pens

• commentary

Antarctic clams, snails, and brittlestars, or perhaps even the sea squirts that he and his colleagues study that could unlock a cure for skin cancer. This new predator, with its crushing claws, is moving in because of the rapidly warming seas. Once they make their way up onto the Antarctic shelf, an archaic marine ecosystem that has been without crushing predators for millennia will find itself largely defenseless. King crabs could very well destroy McClintock's living lab. For McClintock, it's like discovering someone is about to burn down your home and your life's work and possessions.

I have always believed the National Academies of Science and the National Research Council motto "Where the nation turns for independent and expert advice" accurately portrays that most venerable institution. As a nation, we have been seeking their advice since President Lincoln established this scientific body in 1863. Last month, without much fanfare, and little to no attention from the national media, the National Academies released their latest congressionally requested report on climate change.

The report, "America's Choices," does not pull any punches. It reaffirms that climate change is occurring now and that the most effective strategy to combat it would be to begin cutting greenhouse gas emissions immediately.

What makes this report more shocking is the fact it is not new. As far back as 2005, the National Academies of the U.S., France,

Canada, the United Kingdom, India, Italy, Japan, Germany, Brazil and China have jointly called upon policy makers throughout the world to address climate change. The message from the National Academies six years ago was virtually identical to the one in 2011. Climate change is real. We need to drastically reduce greenhouse emissions. We need to aggressively seek technological and scientific solutions. Delaying will only make matters worse.

And now, more than ever, the signs of climate change are becoming starker. The extreme weather and floods in the Midwest and South this spring, historical droughts and fires in Texas and Arizona, permafrost disappearing in Russia/Siberia, floods in Pakistan, massive drought followed by flooding in Australia and whole villages in Alaska disappearing because of sea level rise are just a few recent examples.

The climate is changing so rapidly the Arbor Day Foundation has changed its recommendations for when and where you should plant your trees.

Are we going to follow the National Academy of Sciences and countless scientists' advice on climate change? Are we going to listen to Dr. James McClintock and try to save a place that can lead to cures for cancer? Or are we going to barely lift our heads and refuse to recognize the climate changing around us?

The author is Pat Byington publisher of Bama Environmental News (www.bamanews2.blogspot.com). He is a longtime environmental advocate from Birmingham, Ala., who has served on numerous state and national environmental boards.

The American Forum, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, educational organization located in Washington, D.C., provides views of experts on major public concerns in order to stimulate informed discussion.