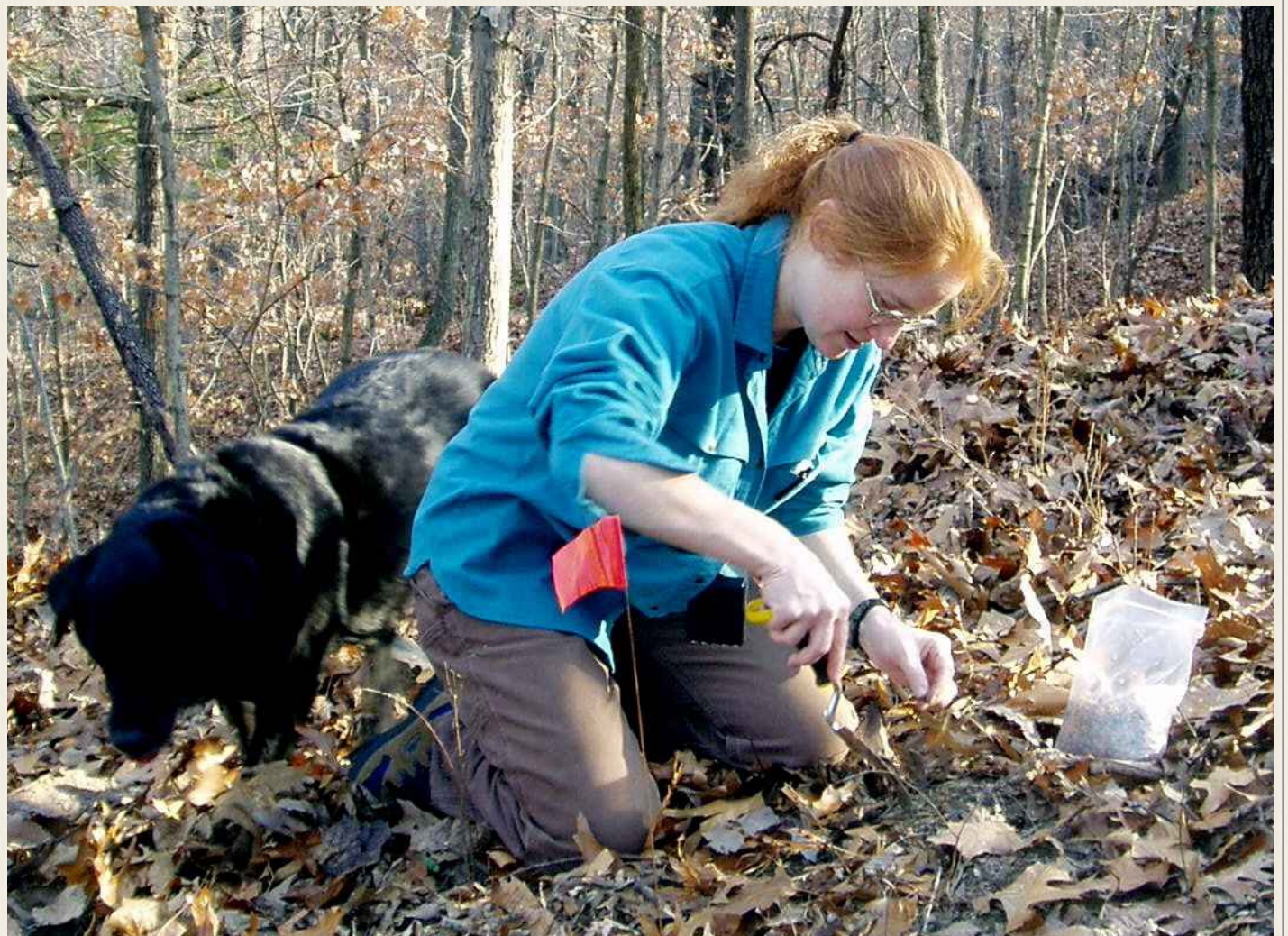

Letters to
Heather

JOHN T. O'CONNOR





Letters to Heather



This collection is a series of whimsical letters to my daughter, Heather, who shares my concerns about inexorable population growth and the progressive depletion of the earth's natural resources.

John T. O'Connor

APRIL, 2003



Top Ten



Top Ten Things Real Americans Enjoyed Most about U.S. Television Reporting of War of Liberation of Iraq

1. Up in Smoke!

Reality television! Real-time films of explosions and billowing clouds of smoke reflecting the remote-controlled destruction of Iraqi ground targets by advanced, laser-guided missiles and bombs. Star Wars on earth.

2. Light Shows!

Nighttime light and sound displays of precision pin-point bombing of Baghdad in over 20,000 initial sorties.

3. American Power!

Images of supersonic attack aircraft, indestructible tanks and high-tech gear employed by U.S. troops against Saddam's ragged, ineffectual, undisciplined, sometimes barefoot, but elite, Republican Guard.

4. Military Debriefings!

Official debunking of reports of incidental collateral damage to the Iraqi people that was most likely caused by Saddam's own terrorist forces firing on his own people, (e.g., "Centcom is investigating the likelihood that an Iraqi boy killed his own parents, destroyed his home and, in his misguided attack, accidentally blew off all his own limbs.")

5. The Hunt for WMD!

Daily reports of possible (and impending) findings of large caches of 'weapons of mass destruction' in schools, hospitals, and bombed-out palaces. Pentagon spokespersons believe recently found buried caches of styli and papyrus might have been used to write down terribly insulting things about America and its president.

6. Network Commentaries!

In your face, screaming, patriotic diatribes regarding the anti-war stance of former U.S. allies, such as the cowardly Frogs, the recalcitrant Krauts, the pacifist Japs and the United Nation's enormous coalition of the unwilling -- (and let's not forget the traitorous Democrats.) Faux Neiuws!

7. They Love Us!

Videos of smiling, liberated Iraqi children waving to welcome coalition troops and scrambling for candy while Iraqis celebrate new-found freedom by carting loot from the remains of 'government buildings' - and universities - and museums - and stores - and hospitals - and unprotected homes - .

8. Silencing of the Liberals!

Enjoyment of the spectacle of intimidated liberal politicians and news correspondents repetitively making whores of themselves by flag-waving, cheer-leading, and adopting Pentagon military double-speak. *Real 'merkins wear lapel flag pins!*

9. The Arrival of Freedom, 4/10/03!

Iraqi celebrations of the joy of unrestrained anarchy as British and American troops eschew any role in policing post-war Iraq. The war is over! Saddam's Baathist regime is finished! Thanks a bunch for the freedom and democracy! Here come our beloved Ayatollahs! Yankee go home! - or we'll blow up your Humvees - with you in them.

10. Nothing!

Just tuned in for sports results, entertainment news, weather forecast and the sexy ads for Victoria's Secret, Girls gone Wild, designer jeans and flavored beer. It jes' don' get no better'n that! God Bless America!

JULY, 2004



Hot House Plants



Inside the Box - The Metamorphosis of Americans into Hot House Plants

Heather,

On arriving in America, your agrarian grandmother observed that Americans are '*hot house plants*'. Indeed, over the last century, we have progressively become a nation of people who live in thermostatically-

controlled, heated and air-conditioned, compartmentalized boxes. We leave our residential (home) boxes only to travel in our heated, air-conditioned, wheeled (mobile) boxes. These mobile transport boxes can be parked on striped concrete pads, primarily, to permit shopping and eating in completely enclosed malls or, alternately, to allow us to work in the brightly-illuminated, heated, carpeted, air-conditioned compartments, booths or carrels provided by our employers.

Throughout our periods of wakefulness, we now conscientiously listen to weather reports as assiduously as if we intended to venture outside. However, through the miracle of wireless electronic communication, it is possible to appeal for emergency assistance (help) if we are actually forced out of our mobile box while in transit between our work and residential sanctuaries.

Contributing to our national paranoia, weather reports in United States are *designed* to warn us of impending disaster. If there is no immediate threat or regional turbulence and the weather is disappointingly fair, weather prognosticators warn of the next foreseeable or conceivable disaster. Media personalities (a.k.a., meteorologists) caution their listeners to rivet their attention on local weather updates so as to be forewarned against sudden, unanticipated changes in meteorological conditions, however improbable. Annually, forecasters warn of or predict the '*storm of the century*'.

Continually, media listeners are cautioned against venturing outside of their heated, air-conditioned enclaves for fear of becoming too hot (> 70 degrees Fahrenheit), too cold (< 80 degrees Fahrenheit), getting wet or being assaulted by brisk winds. The principal function of today's weather forecaster appears to reinforce and intensify our apprehension of being caught outdoors.

Our particular, special brand of ‘Disaster Weather’, guided by Network-Super-Doppler radar, must be monitored on a minute-by-minute basis if one is to avoid potential predation by destructive natural phenomena, such as adverse barometric pressure.

One outgrowth of our almost universal national fear of weather is the near-absence of pedestrian traffic. Sidewalks and bicycle pathways are nearly absent, even in most highly-enriched communities. Seemingly, only those too young to fully understand the intrinsic danger of weather or those who are obligated to undertake environmental risk to assist their pets in depositing their bodily wastes may be found at any distance beyond the grassy boundaries of their climate-controlled bastions.

Primarily, those whose labor demands external exposure (e.g., construction workers) plus those who are ordered outdoors by medical authorities as part of therapy to recover from heart or knee surgery may be observed fully immersed in our hostile external atmosphere. Also, to some degree, society’s marginally productive elements, including children, joggers, political protesters, pollsters, canvassers, evangelists, environmental activists and the homeless, may also be found outdoors. Even including these aberrations, the average external exposure time for all Americans has been systematically reduced to less than one-half hour per day. In addition, as a result of technological advances in recent decades, it has now become possible for most Americans to walk as little as fifteen furlongs per day with only the smallest part of that outside their protective boxes. Even today’s agricultural practitioners can enjoy climate-controlled refuge and conservative radio talk shows within the enclosure of gargantuan, War-of-the-Worlds, mobile farm machinery.

Partially offsetting the safety and security provided from adverse natural elements by our static and dynamic enclosures, are the high-speed dynamics of individually-piloted automotive transport units competing for space on a closely confined, interweaving highway canvas. This activity may, perhaps, illustrate the single most powerful indicator of the increasing irrelevance of weather in modern society. Demonstrably, the more adverse the meteorological and surface conditions become for our nation of automotive pilots, the higher their vehicle velocities and the closer and more erratic the interweaving mobile box configurations become.

Rather than a sociopathic response, this near-universal, though illegal, dangerous and irresponsible mass behavior, is believed to be justifiable because it permits more rapid docking of the nation's mobile units with their mother ships. Often, this latter docking maneuver enables most Americans to further avoid exposure to the world outside the box through the use of coded, secure, radio-controlled mobile port gate openers.

Future scientific advances and computer enhancements are expected to make it still more technically feasible to extend our control over exposure to earth's hostile environment with its unpredictable and dangerous potential for destroying precious human lives. The dangers engendered by wind, flood, lightning, storm, earthquake, tornado, tsunami, typhoon, undomesticated animals, insects, bacteria, virus, pathogenic protozoans, nematodes, helminths, acid rain, ozone, sulfur dioxide, nitrous oxides, carbon monoxide, particulates, asbestos, lead, hydrocarbons, unrestrained and unfiltered sunlight will be increasingly moderated by extending and reinforcing all our

physical barriers against environmental vagaries. Increasingly, weather forecasts will be quaint relics of your ancestor's past lives.

Assuming long-term reductions in international tensions and the progressive democratization of terrorist nations, it should no longer take the threat of a nuclear holocaust to prod future generations into seeking the ultimate security of tomorrow's totally confined, hermetically sealed, cable-fed microcosm, our new American dream.

Someday, you may live to see, as with much of professional sports currently, even the summer and winter Olympic games, including the ski jump competition, held indoors.

Love, Dad



Exit Strategy



Exit Strategy

Heather,

Mission Accomplished! If any news reports are correct, most of the members of the 50-member military coalition the U.S. assembled to bring peace, freedom and democracy to Iraq have or are implementing an exit strategy. Spain, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Honduras have withdrawn. Thailand, Norway, New Zealand, and the Philippines are withdrawing or planning to withdraw soon. Portugal, Ukraine, and, recently,

Poland have withdrawn or propose to withdraw their forces. The Netherlands are withdrawing troops, but will continue to help “train security forces”, the new mantra. *“Meanwhile, Brer’ Rabbit, he lie low!”*

Officially, in name, the “Coalition” is disbanded! The ever-diminishing list of coalition members has been removed from the White House web site. The indeterminate residual is now referred to as the “multinational force”. Somehow, this revised terminology may help shield those nations that do not want it widely known (especially, at home) that it still has troops “on the ground”. South Korea, which was with us up to our final victory in Vietnam, remains at our side. Hyundai!

Polls seem to indicate that the most delicate question in our evolving U.S. history is “How and when can we get out?” Can the U.S. declare victory in Iraq and adopt the same exit strategy as our former allies? Alternately, what are the benefits of having our troops stay - ever more sweaty and alienated - for years longer? With the attendant porkage of each new defense spending bill, will ‘ultimate victory’ be synonymous with ‘bankruptcy’?

Happily, the search for WMD in Iraq is over! Suggesting that the U.S. release some detainees being held on the pretext that they had vital information regarding WMD, the CIA issued a report (April 2005) indicating that their investigation into “weapons of mass destruction” has been brought to a close. Now we can begin the search for them in Iran and Pakistan.

I’m sure that what our political and military leaders are learning in Iraq will serve us well in the future. As a result, final victory will be a lot faster when we take on Iran.

Shouldn’t cost much either.

Love, Dad

MAY, 2005



Gasolene



I Had a Dream - about the Price of Gasolene

Heather,

More roads and lower taxes! It's something most people can (and did) vote for. We sent a message! But did that message only ensure that our

nation will continue to become increasingly indebted and headed toward bankruptcy?

2005 - 2006: \$3.00 per gallon:

A small, but nervous, group of citizens (self-defined “environmentalists”), spooked by oil at \$70 per barrel, believe they see some handwriting (possibly, in Arabic) on the wall. Toyota increases the U.S. allocation of its fuel-efficient hybrid to 100,000 units per year and still maintains a waiting list as sales of large domestic vehicles go into decline (Hummm!). ‘Trailing’ manufacturers advertise plans for production of fuel-efficient vehicles in the future, assuming they have one.

BP reassures there is no shortage of oil and gas for the long term. *“The world holds enough proved reserves for 40 years of supply and at least 60 years of gas supply at current consumption rates.”* This is most reassuring to all of us over the age of 70. However, ‘current consumption rates’ are reportedly growing at 2% per year along with the surging economies of China (which is soon expected to become the world’s second largest consumer of oil) and India. Still, it is nice to know that the benevolent petroleum company expects the world to last, at least, another 60 years.

Independently, if not apolitically, our own USGS has estimated that ‘peak oil’ will occur ‘between 2003 and 2020’ or, for practical infrastructure planning purposes, ‘peak oil’ is already here. Still, civil engineers and State Governors continue to equate transportation system improvements with highway and bridge construction, the nation’s preeminent and most firmly established entitlement program. (Widening = Jobs and Improvement!)

Congress addresses energy crisis by lengthening the period of 'daylight savings time' and mandating increased federal subsidies to further stimulate the energy-intensive production of corn and soybean-based "American" fuels. Feared as a threat to continued "growth and development", restraints on petroleum consumption are not proposed. (Paving = Progress!; Saving = Economic Decline!)

2007 - 2008: \$4.00 per gallon:

Airlines, already facing bankruptcy, further modify flight schedules and destinations, trim amenities and explore consolidation with bus companies. Management cuts flight staff and maintenance programs to reduce costs while air fares are progressively reduced to retain ridership. Government is called upon to underwrite costs of increased airport security and provide body bags.

The trucking industry continues to suffer severe fuel cost impacts. Truckers take to consuming ethanol. Increases in transportation costs are reflected in prices charged for the full range of products that must be hauled long distances over the highway. Environmental activists maintain that locally-grown and produced products are not only fresher, but actually have a price advantage. Coke at \$1.00 per can; bottled water, \$2.00.

While the economy continues its inexorable long-term decline, Administration calls for extended tax relief and mutes discussion of investment of Social Security taxes in individual stock and bond accounts. Analysts revise 2041 date for exhaustion of Social Security trust fund and consider date for devaluation of dollar by one-half to match Euro. Foreign creditors threaten retaliation by purchasing all (both) remaining profitable U.S.-owned corporations.

When their proposed purchase of New Zealand falls through, Japanese government makes offer for all privately-owned land in California. China offers more, in cash.

2009 - 2010: \$3.50 per liter:

Incoming U.S. Administration decides best way to lower pump prices is by embracing S.I. units. As all prices rise in general, consumers with GED begin to discern that the cost of fuel is, not just for their 'fill-up', but is an integral part of everything else they purchase, food and whiskey included.

Sales of fuel-efficient 'hybrid' vehicles dominate market. Japanese introduce new vehicle that runs on AAA batteries. Living within 'walking distance' becomes, first, a virtue, then, a necessity.

With U.S. at point of imminent economic collapse, Senate concludes that ethanol, biodiesel, and even O'Connor BioBeef subsidies are no longer feasible. Red states turn purple. O'Connor sues for breach of promise; refuses to pay \$250 million in delinquent taxes.

Drilling proceeds apace in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. America's energy independence is on the horizon! Half-year-long supply of American oil is on the way - to China and Japan!

While this was just a dream, I still can't help feeling empathy for all those who are healthy and under 70.

Sorry, Heather!

Love, Dad

JUNE, 2005



O'Connor's Biobeef



Energy for the Future - O'Connor's BioBeef

Heather,

Reduced dependence on '*foreign*' oil sounds good! but, then, why did we go to war?

The U.S. consumed much of its own oil in a span of 40 years, from 1930 to 1970. Thereafter, our domestic production declined and we started buying oil from foreign sources while, at the same time, we accelerated our production

of cars and subsidized the building of highways. See *the USA in your Chevrolet!*

Now, our legislators are authorizing drilling to recover our nation's last significant stash of oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Preserve. Environmental considerations aside (way aside), this was really our oil piggy bank. In the long run, will it really benefit us to empty our own reserve now, particularly considering that ours is a relatively small piggy bank and that we continue to squander the world's oil with monstrous excesses?

To '*domesticate*' demand, we also plan to mandate and subsidize the burning of an increasingly large portion of our corn and soybean crops, known to a handful of naysayers as '*food*'. Corn and soybeans are '*renewable*', at least, to the extent that our land and eroded topsoil can subsequently be economically reclaimed from silted reservoirs and encroaching oceans.

Since our government has already established a generous research program sponsoring the development of new '*renewable*' fuels, I would like to enlist your help in preparing a proposal to seek federal subsidies for rendering and burning ham, chicken, turkey, and beef to further help our nation achieve energy independence. We might name our product, *O'Connor's 'BioBeef'*.

Will you also help me develop a parallel proposal for converting potatoes and rice to coke and charcoal? Your mother can help with that. Finally, starting with grapes and sugar cane, we are already halfway to a sweeter, more fragrant ethanol blend.

In preparing our talking points for state legislators focussed on advancing new business enterprise, we can point with pride to our program's added potential for helping reduce obesity among America's children.

U. S. Government Springs into Action to Develop an Innovative Energy Policy

Another major innovative feature of our government's 'energy bill' was the extension of daylight savings time. This approach was so simple and painless that our representatives could decide that we should have it all year long and save still more energy.

Not surprisingly, our well-travelled legislators did not envision energy savings through increased vehicle fuel economy as feasible. I guess they will let gas prices take care of that.

Always vigilant, Texas legislators successfully included a provision to protect makers of additives produced in their state from lawsuits related to groundwater contamination. Along with representatives from the adversely impacted Northeast states and California, the Texas group takes a dim view of ethanol as a replacement fuel additive noting that it takes more foreign oil to produce than it provides, actually increases air pollution and is, primarily, a sop to Midwestern farm states. While seemingly potent, these arguments are no match for the political brownie points to be gained by supporting subsidies for burning food in the corn-producing states. Thus, we know where to seek political support for our O'Connor BioBeef program. ...by the way, what are they doing with all those dead chickens in Asia?

Who's to Blame?

A recent poll shows Americans blame a wide range of *other* people, especially *environmentalists*, for rising gasoline prices. I disagree with the Possum! It seems pretty clear that we have not met the enemy.

Love, Dad

AUGUST, 2005



The Image of God



The Image of God - Is it really fading?

Heather,

I suspect, as others have already pointed out, that many fervent believers have become increasingly concerned about the inexorable advancements in

science and technology. Hence, the aggressive counter-marketing of *'intelligent design'*.

Over the last century in particular, it seems that every major scientific discovery has come at the expense of not only human ignorance, but mythology. The invention of electronic systems; the formulation of antibiotics; the discovery of previously unimaginable cures for disease; the development of surgical techniques to replace vital body parts; programs of planetary exploration which have led to clearer understanding of the composition and age of the universe; and now, even cloning (the ability to replicate cells and life forms) -- all have seemingly come at the expense of the concept of an all-powerful, all-knowing *'being'*. Any beneficiary of this modern technology (e.g., someone who has undergone heart or brain surgery), might (or might not) be forgiven for believing that today's modern *'miracles'* are being created by scientists.

Stem-Cell Research

The possibility that stem-cell research might lead to simple and effective cures for *'incurable'* diseases or, worse, the cloning of humans, may be viewed as a disaster of the first order of magnitude for those that cherish the view that only a divine being should hold such power. To make matters worse for the faithful, one scientist envisions that, someday, human life will be created from basic chemicals. (I certainly hope not. We don't need the extra human biomass.)

Euthanasia

On another ethical front, many faithful believe that euthanasia must be denied on the grounds that only a divine presence should make *'life-and-death'* decisions. (Inexplicably, even for many religious sects, deaths deliberately inflicted in wars to preserve or extend *'democracy and freedom'* may be exceptions.)

However, as our more affluent populations age, euthanasia is increasingly viewed as a desirable alternative to merely allowing the most painful ravages and indignities of senescence to continue. The cruel religious politicization of the Terry Schaivo affair seems to have contributed mightily to the fear that one's own life could be extended interminably based on someone else's fervently-held religious convictions.

I share the latter view and will opt for any possible assistance in ending my life when mental and physical incapacities have made life an intolerable burden. I trust my *'living will'* will provide the maximum flexibility under current law in allowing me to die under my own terms.

Enjoy your inheritance!

Love, Dad

MAY, 2006



Science, Faith & O'Connorism



Science, Faith and O'Connorism

Heather,

From Wikipedia

Science (from [Latin](#) scientia - knowledge) refers to the system of acquiring knowledge – based on [empiricism](#), experimentation, and methodological [naturalism](#). The term science also refers to the organized body of [knowledge](#) humans have gained by such [research](#).

Most [scientists](#) maintain that scientific investigation must adhere to the [scientific method](#), a process for evaluating [empirical knowledge](#) which explains [observable](#) events in [nature](#) as a result of natural causes, rejecting [supernatural](#) notions.

Mathematical Science: $2 + 2 = 4$

The word **faith** has various uses; its central meaning is similar to "[belief](#)", "[trust](#)" or "[confidence](#)", but unlike these terms, "faith" tends to imply a [transpersonal](#) rather than [interpersonal](#) relationship – with [God](#) or a [higher power](#). The object of faith can be a person (or even an inanimate object or [state of affairs](#)) or a [proposition](#) (or body of propositions, such as a [religious credo](#)). In each case, however, faith is in an aspect of the object and cannot be logically proven or objectively known. Faith can also be defined as accepting as true something which one has been told by someone who is believed to be trustworthy. It can also mean believing unconditionally. In its proper sense faith means trusting the word of another.

Age of the Earth: Whomever's date you choose to believe.

O'Connorism is faith in the existence of the apostrophe.

An **apostrophe** (') is a [punctuation](#) and sometimes [diacritic](#) mark in [languages](#) written in the [Latin alphabet](#). In [English](#), it marks omissions, forms the possessive, and, in special cases, helps form plurals. The word comes from [Greek](#) apóstrophos, through [Latin](#) and [French](#). Irish surnames often contain apostrophes, for instance the name O'Connor. This arose from a rendering of the Irish Ó.

O'Connorists Use of Apostrophes: O'Co'nno'r

With the dawn of the age of cynicism and illiteracy, there are many who no longer believe in the existence of the apostrophe. Clumsily-written computer programs (crappy CPs for PCs) do not accommodate the apostrophe, creating recognition problems for credit card companies, hotel managers and government agencies attempting to maintain files on suspected terrorists.

For example, without the apostrophe, data entry, at best, results in either the listing of Oconnor or O. Connor. These are not the same. The confusion is occasionally overcome by a collection agency after an account has become delinquent -- and collectible.

Alternately, on late arrival, when your hotel is full and your room has been rented to someone else, your reservation was deemed to be lost because of a '*computer error*'. Happily, therefore, no one is culpable -- except, perhaps, for the programmer, now working for FEMA, who was unable to handle the apostrophe.

What can apostrophe users do to resist the tsunami of apostrophe abuses? For one thing, we can discard all mailings and communications without an apostrophe. They did not come from friends anyway.

And, if our bill payments are found to be delinquent, we can always blame our creditor's computers. It won't hurt the computer's feelings unless, of course, they are Macs.

Keep the Faith,

Lo've, Dad



Ask Not



Ask *not* what we can do for America!

(we probably won't do it anyway !)

Heather,

For all the patriotic fervor exhibited in the wake of the cruel and cowardly attack on New York City, the posturing of some Americans might lead one to think that we would make real sacrifices to maintain freedom and protect the democratic values we purport to cherish.

There is little doubt that many Americans have readily taken up arms and rushed to point them at designated terrorists. To many, being a loyal American means keeping a weapon loaded and being prepared, even eager, to use it against not only a terrorist, but potential or suspected terrorists.

However, when it comes to making less flamboyant, less visible and more subtle displays of concern for our nation's future, such as the humble act of picking up a piece of trash or saving a gallon of gasoline for future generations of Americans, for many, the veneer of national concern and patriotism appears to vanish.

Columbians are no exception. Given the opportunity to continue to conserve resources by recycling, a majority concluded that the effort required was not really worth their precious time. Many refused to recognize any relationship between expending their own personal energy to maintain a highly successful and economic recycling program and any obligation to sustain this American community's modest role in fledgling national efforts to conserve energy and material resources. Instead, a majority of voters rationalized that city government should bear the collective responsibility that they were unwilling to undertake individually.

'Obese, ignorant, and indolent', a majority of Americans throughout the nation contribute to the wasteful destruction of both this nation's and the world's resources. It should come as no surprise that long-term economic debt accumulation and decline is now clearly our legacy. The optimism of stockbrokers and media pundits that the current economic climate is an oft-

repeated, cyclical transient and that economic recovery will inevitably occur 'in the next quarter' or sometime thereafter, is a myopic illusion.

What should be obvious is that our nation is, daily, becoming increasingly populated with consumers while, at the same time, is in the aggressive process of dissipating its timber, mineral, energy, and water resources. The nation is progressively losing much of its most productive arable land to land development and soil erosion. Erosion promises to be vastly accelerated as millions of marginal acres are pressed into service to produce corn destined for costly fuel for inefficient motor vehicles and an impoverished national public transportation system. Americans and the peoples of the world will not be as resource-rich tomorrow -- and every day after -- as they are today.

Worst of all, our nation continues to devolve into a diverse and growing assortment of rabid consumers and debtors with seemingly one unifying characteristic. We have become a nation of scofflaws. On our highways and streets, speeding, tailgating, and disobeying traffic regulations have become a national right. Cheating the government on taxes while demanding additional social benefits is as common as voting for incompetent legislators so long as they promise to enrich us individually at the expense of impoverishing us collectively. We vote for *cut and spend!*

... and, I believe, it is *not* that most of us don't know what our obligations are, what the future holds, and what must be done! So, don't ask

Love, Dad

OCTOBER, 2006



Economic Decline



How to Cope with Global Economic Decline

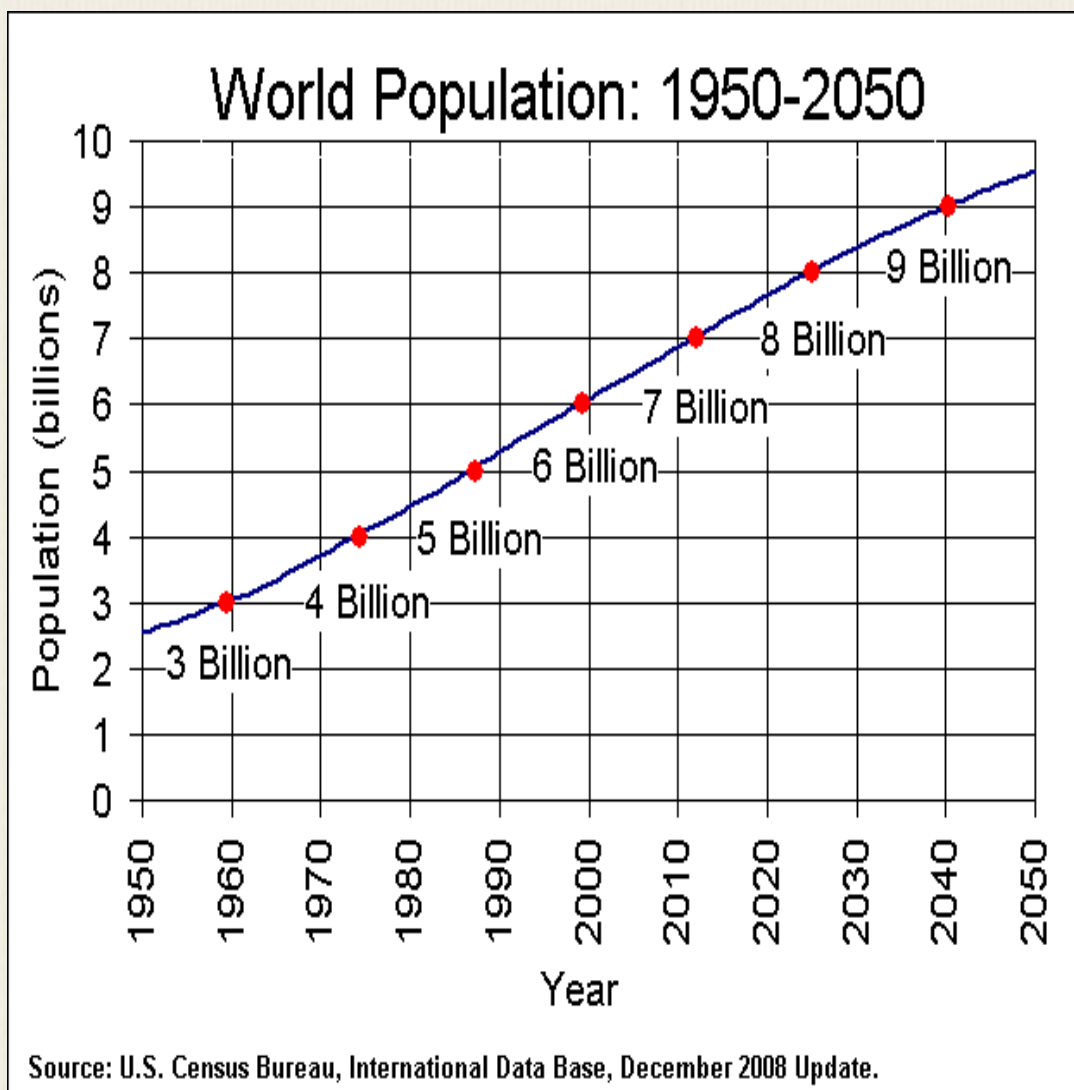
-- and why we won't.

Heather,

If you can't conceive that the world economy, including US, has begun its descent into senescence, a period of plummeting, irreversible economic decline, please stop reading here. This rant will only make you angry and suggest that I am, hopefully, insane.

Population in Cascade

If you are still reading, there is a good chance you are likely to be aware that humankind is so prolific that global population, with few exceptions, continues its growth at a cancerous rate. In some science museums and on the web, we can find displays with digital counters indicating just how rapidly human population growth is estimated to be occurring. Even in the face of current-day wars, disease and desperate famine, mankind has demonstrated that its ability to procreate can trump any adversity plus all efforts at restraint.



In regions of desperate poverty and overcrowding, efforts to bring population under control is challenged as either governmental tyranny or an blatant affront to God's plan for subduing the earth. For all of us, inexorable world population growth, along with increasing life spans in many regions, is not a choice. It is our global destiny. There are even those among us who welcome increasing birth rates as the handmaiden of economic development and a harbinger of needed replacements for an aging, depleted, unproductive workforce.

Resource Consumption

Men, women and, certainly in the U.S., children consume. The greater the wealth each individual or family can command, the more resources they consume. For the most affluent families, sprawling suburban homes and country estates have grown larger, in part, to house the modern machinery and capture the treasures that their commuter-shopper-owners accumulate. Even confronted with knowledge of the depletion of resources, (and the decline of most animal species other than man), Americans have elected to engorge their homes, garages, motor vehicles, boats, RVs, refrigerator-freezers, couches, television screens and bodies. In some modern castles, master bathrooms have become indoor water theme parks physically capable of accommodating an inner-city family of six. The bedroom of the most affluent might entertain a Roman orgy.

Planning Horizon

Few people (and, least likely, venture capitalists or politicians) think in terms of decades, much less centuries. For most middle-class citizens, considering where to take their next vacation trip would constitute long-term planning. For others, it is whether and where to go out for dinner. Natural

human traits of self-indulgence plus optimism lead all of us to embrace a short planning horizon undergirded by the tacit belief that the status quo will persist. After all, there is neither incentive for nor pleasure in planning for natural disaster, energy shortages, economic decline -- or, to put it simply, hard times. Our basic assumption is that the affluence that supports our current lifestyle will continue and, conceivably, improve. If it doesn't, we will reallocate the blame and vote for the other party the next time. The tide can be reversed; oil prices can be brought down; the buffalo will come back.

Provincialism, Tribalism and Religious Rivalries

Rather than uniting broadly to address major social, economic and environmental issues, humans have evolved to be more tribal. Socially, we divide ourselves along religious, economic and geographic divides (Go, Tigers! Beat Kansas!) to compete (often, conduct war) for dwindling or scarce resources, such as land, water, timber, food, metals, landfill space, bragging rights, and, as we should all now recognize, energy.

Unanimity in opinion, purpose and belief, even within a small neighborhood, is increasingly rare. In middle America, adjacent homeowners may either believe what is offered on Fox News or subscribe to "*An Inconvenient Truth*", but probably not both. Under the circumstances we see around us, what would you say is the likelihood that the world population will unite to recognize and confront any global issue?

The Pollyannas

You and I are not alone in contemplating the long-term effects of the adverse forces at work in the world. Hundreds of contemporary writers and scholars have long been warning of the accelerating degradation of every

conceivable component of our planet and our society. However, almost universally, their last chapters seem to be derived from an Elizabeth Borton *Glad Book*. *“If we stop...; “If governments take action to...; “We have to educate...; “If we recognize...”* In other words, if we simply reverse the well-established course of human nature.

Do you really think that is going to happen? Or is it more likely that, as individuals become more desperate and struggle to hold on to those resources and perquisites they already control, life will only get worse? Brutally worse.

Sorry, Heather!

Love, Dad

NOVEMBER, 2006



Contempt and Confidence



**Contempt for our Intelligence
coupled with Confidence in our Gullibility**

Heather,

Bill Clinton said he didn't inhale!

Pastor Ted Haggard claimed he never used the meth he bought! (He also didn't have sex with that man! ...Oh, wait, now he says he lied about that, ...but his wife still stands by him and he may have some residual meth for sale. {Hallelujah!})

On The Road to Rehab! Mark Foley became infatuated with young pages because, as alterboy, he was sexually molested and later became an alcoholic (as well as Congressman).

And while Arnold may have fondled a few plump and protruding boobies, he never really enjoyed doing it!

In retrospect, many bizarre claims and apologies actually seem quite credible when compared with what we have been asked to believe during the 2006 political campaign.

Impending Victory in the (Preemptive, Preventive, Slam Dunk) War on Terror!

The President hop-scotched the country (stopping where his GOP colleagues were still willing to be seen with him) to claim progress toward victory in the Iraq war and to reaffirm his support for the leadership provided the military by his soon-to-be-fired Secretary of Defense. Moreover, although the war was *'never about oil'*, our President admonished us to consider what it would mean to our security if the revenue from all those Iraqi oil reserves fell into the hands of terrorist sympathizers.

While the Democrats were portrayed as eager to '*cut-and-run*', the President and his Rovian counselors announced that they had devised '*a plan*' for establishing a series of '*benchmarks*' which would lead us along the path to final victory. (We are advised that these stepping stones can't be divulged because, if the enemy knew them, it would endanger the troops '*on the ground*'). One can also imagine that, if the plan were leaked, our newly-recruited enemies might not even care -- so long as they took us to hell with them.

In announcing the new path to victory, we learned that the Administration never really advocated the inflexibility implied in '*staying the course*'. (Damn those videotapes! Damn *The Daily Show*!)

On television sets in every living room in the nation, clusterbombs of political ads demeaned the integrity and, more pointedly, the patriotism of candidates competing for public office. If they were all true, who was left to run the country? (*Call me?*)

And then there is the National Review! But now, I am simply wasting your time...

Love, Dad



Accounting Stance



Taking an Accounting Stance

Happy Birthday, Heather,

When you were a few years younger, my friend and now emeritus Professor of Economics, Whitney Hicks, explained to me that one's view of economics varied with their "*accounting stance*."

I took his description to mean that if you looked only to your own personal financial welfare, you might do things that you would not do if you took a broader, more liberal, view. You might readily take advantage of other people's vulnerabilities to enrich yourself. Operating a gambling casino would be an example of this practice, to my mind. The economies of some of your friends and neighbors might be ruined by gambling losses in order to enrich you, personally.

Also, as I interpret this concept, if one is solely focussed on the localized benefits that accrue to Columbia (or Boone County), it matters less if one impoverishes surrounding communities or, for that matter, the State and nation as a whole. I believe the noncompetitive grants and *earmarks* that Senator 'Kit' Bond so frequently brings to the University are examples of the triumph of this kind of provincialism over Americanism. The race does not go to the swift.

Alternately, if we adopted our stance as Americans, we would work toward the entire nation being economically strong and all of its citizens, healthy and prosperous. We would choose economic options that would benefit most Americans irrespective of their race, creed, color, sex, and wherever in the country they lived. By this definition, there may be relatively few Americans in the U.S.

As opposed to taking accounting stances as Americans, political leaders are commonly elected to fight for subsidies that will primarily benefit industry or agriculture in their state or region. The subsidies for farming and the production of ethanol from corn in the Midwest are examples. That these monetary diversions from our federal treasury do not benefit most Americans living in the coastal regions of the U.S. is highlighted by political opposition in those regions.

Soon, rapidly increasing beef, pork, and poultry prices may indicate to meat consumers that subsidies for corn-based ethanol production are not serving their best economic interests. For example, Columbia's *Show-Me Farms* has announced that, after next month, the price for their freezer beef will increase from \$2.65 to \$2.90 per carcass pound. They attribute this increase to the recent doubling and tripling of their feed costs for corn, oats, soy beans, and flax. Much of the increase in grain costs results from the marketing of corn for ethanol production. Next year, further increases in the price of many foods are expected owing to the rush of farmers to plant the more lucrative corn in lieu of other, less profitable grains.

You will undoubtedly think of more and better examples of accounting stances influencing economic perspectives (e.g., Alaska's Senator Ted Stevens and his proposed '*bridge to nowhere*'). I believe you will find this concept to be very useful when listening to frivolous economic arguments.

As we listen to some of our community leaders, we sometimes gain a raw perspective of their accounting stance. Some would have Columbia create a '*black hole*' into which economic resources from surrounding communities, states, and the nation as a whole would be drawn -- in order to promote our local growth and prosperity. (This stance would probably make sense to someone who intrinsically assumes that we are so much smarter, more creative, and more productive than the rest of the nation's population that we would put these resources to the highest possible use and, in the end, everyone would benefit. ...a kind of *trickle back* theory. *What's good for General Motors ...!* We may all participate in this kind of fantasy when we speculate, '*If I were king...*')

Recently, the University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Kansas have agreed to hold football games in a larger sports venue in Kansas City. Both universities will recognize greater revenues from more ticket sales. From the standpoint of an unaligned Missourian, this is a net overall benefit to the State even though Columbia's business owners stand to lose substantially.

Visioning for a Future that may not Come

As you know, Columbia and Boone County are now involved in a *visioning* process which has brought the costs of our regional rate of growth and development into question. Through the newspaper, a local developer has argued that our much-maligned '*urban sprawl*' should be acceptable because it gives homeowners more choice as to where and in what ambience they want to live. Such progressive sprawl might not be considered an economic problem unless part of the costs of the new developments are imposed on or shifted to those outside those developments and not born by the developers themselves.

Again, this is where the issue of *accounting stance* surfaces. Developers may prefer to look at the costs and benefits to their particular development while the community at large must look at overall costs and benefits to Columbia and Boone County. The community's stance would require far broader consideration of traffic, congestion, *quality of life*, and consumption of existing infrastructure capacity; issues which would not be part of the developer's analysis. But, '*Quality of Life*' *isn't worth crap!* asserts the motivational speaker hired for a 2006 Regional Economic Development meeting. Perhaps this apologist's contention highlights the intrinsic difference in the respective accounting stances of developers and established residents.

What constitutes Growth?

This is a topic for more discussion and another letter, perhaps. *Growth* is something that, to my mind, requires a clearer definition. We can be pretty sure that not many who often use that term are thinking in terms of an increase in the population of poor and needy people like the refugees from Katrina. However, as Houston seems to have learned, sometimes, *growth* happens.

Guess I better go the *Show-Me Farms* meat market and get some freezer beef as a birthday gift for you before the price increases. We may all be using less barbecue sauce in America's future.

Love, Dad



Quality of Life



Columbia's Quality of Life - *not worth crap?*

Heather,

Sometimes, it takes an outsider to confront us with the *truth*. Brought to Columbia by our local economic developers, our expert explains that, not only are we deluding ourselves about the importance of our *quality of life* in Columbia, but the City's economy, as measured by economic growth, is going into the toilet, as well.

Growing Pains

We all know that a large segment of people in any community are highly dependent for their livelihood (or, at least, advantaged by) continuing *growth* -- particularly if that growth is in the more affluent segment of the population. In Columbia, a broad spectrum of this growth dependency share the belief that, to some extent, virtually every person in our community stands to prosper from an ever-increasing and increasingly affluent population base.

Similarly, administrators of colleges and universities, seeking to expand program offerings, attract larger numbers of students, increase sports revenue, capitalize on external funding, encourage alumni contributions, or market their graduates, equate success with categorical growth.

However, as everyone realizes, *growth* of almost any kind places continually increasing demands on community resources. Demands increase for housing, schools, open space, utility services (water, power, sewer, storm drains, refuse disposal, cable), food, materials, banking and medical services, roads, streets, parking, park benches, homeless shelters, and, ultimately, the fees, taxes, and debt service needed to finance an ever-expanding urban infrastructure.

Advocates of Limits

Another growing (or, perhaps more accurately, aging) constituency in many communities advocate slow, cautious and fiscally *conservative* growth. Viewing the denuding of wooded areas as blight, increased traffic as a personal danger, and the inexorably increasing burden of taxes to support gratuitous expansion as an economic threat, they oppose municipal incentives for developments which might further stimulate sprawl, intensify urbanization, and increase public debt.

In Columbia, this constituency, allied with avowed environmentalists, may be heard to cite the imperative of maintaining Columbia's venerated '*quality of life*'. They take pride in trees and gardens and rail against the growing expanses of asphalt, concrete and illuminated signage. Many assign high value to the aesthetic elements they perceive as having once made Columbia an attractive and agreeable place to live.

Marketing the Fear of Economic Decline

But, when quantifying a community's *economic strength*, "*Quality of Life isn't worth crap!*", asserted the keynote speaker highlighted at Columbia's 2006 Regional Economic Development meeting. Moreover, even the presence of a four-year university does not cause economic growth -- unless the university increases enrollment. For a \$5,000 fee and using a self-designed formula that included '*28 factors*', the evaluator warned Columbians that our economic strength has progressively declined since 1995. This was due to the '*promulgation*' of low wage service and retail jobs (shopping centers?, bars and restaurants?) and our community's failure to provide powerful economic incentives (tax relief, land) for the maintenance and import of high wage primary industry jobs, such as in manufacturing.

Makes sense. Higher paying jobs should clearly make a community's economy stronger than lower paying jobs -- or an increasing number of unemployed, displaced, immigrant, retired, or homeless people, for that matter.

However, even without economic incentives, sometimes *growth happens*. Ask Houston.

So what are we to do? As yet another local manufacturing facility faces closure, Columbia, along with the rest of the nation, appears to be losing its

higher wage manufacturing jobs to increasing material costs and lower wage labor in Mexico and East Asia.

What does this mean for the future for Columbia? How do a City and nation respond to the unpleasant prospect of progressively losing their higher paying jobs and *getting poorer*? Does accelerated upscale home construction enrich us? If we continue to build more mansions, who will buy them? If the university produces ever more graduates capable of stem cell research, who will hire them? Will renaming our airport be a key to leading America's airlines out of bankruptcy and revitalizing our local manufacturing base? Should we move to increase Columbia's average wage by giving our unemployed and lowest paid citizens one-way tickets to faraway places?

If Columbia is to face an ongoing economic contraction, will we still be able to sustain the vestiges or illusions of the richness of our '*quality of life*'? Or will we ultimately be confronted with perennial population growth, declining incomes, urbanization, increased traffic, fat-promoting suburban sprawl, and, ultimately, diminished civic pride?

Growing bigger while getting poorer may be something we should *vision* about.

Love, Dad

"The jet aircraft is better than the rattling wagon only insofar as it bears its human burden to a better destination." MacKinley Kantor (?)



The Business Model

The Business Model

Heather,

In the face of loss of our manufacturing base and declining employment, Columbia's business community plans to appeal to the City and County to provide additional subsidies (more land for development, more tax breaks, more TDDs) to attract new business investment. As citizens of Columbia, we can learn a lot from these good businessmen.

Following their example, I believe we should put our elected (and soon-to-be-elected) City officials to work for us to make the City more profitable. For example, *impact fees* should be set so that the City makes considerably more money on extending utility services than it costs. The added revenue would make it possible for the City to provide more support for maintaining public facilities, supporting the 'Arts', and restoring the environmental damages caused by urbanization.

The extra money might even help Columbia fully support its public transportation system so that there is a truly viable alternative to the hotly disputed street widenings, the ever-increasing and aggressive traffic, and the daytime storage of thousands of vehicles in the center of the City.

As part of making Columbia citizens healthier, substantial development fees might make it feasible to install sidewalks and bicycle lanes, particularly near schools. Street '*narrowings*' that provide sidewalks and take land back from motor vehicles might not only accommodate pedestrians, but promote better neighborhoods.

Business leaders can, and should, ask for what they want.

So, should citizens!

Love, Dad



‘D’ Generation



The ‘D’ Generation

Heather,

As part of my personal *‘visioning’* process, I have concluded that those born in this new millennium will belong to the *‘D’ Generation*.

As we observe U.S. manufacturing and industrial productivity continue to recede; major airlines teeter on the edge of bankruptcy; the 'big three' U.S. automakers report record losses; an increasing segment of our former middle class begin to default on their home mortgages; and as we hear mounting complaints about the adverse impact of soaring fuel costs on family budgets, it seems clear that *peak prosperity*, brought about by the cheap energy of the twentieth century, has now passed and our nation (and the world) are entering a prolonged (perhaps, permanent) period of decline in affluence and living standards. The sun is setting on the American Dream!

Global warming? A solution is at hand! Energy impoverishment of the 'D' generation should lead to substantial reductions in carbon dioxide emissions. In fact, a steady decline in the affordability of cars and trucks combined with the increased costs of home heating and cooling (the latter, a dispensable luxury, many will decide) should make the 'D' Generation 'carbon negative'.

As I foresee the future, the 'D' Generation will not be a happy one. They will drive less (if at all), ride busses and trains, and walk more (Americans hate that!). They will need to work harder (especially, if they don't have a job); eat less meat; enjoy less 'disposable' income; do less shopping; live in smaller lodgings; and receive less education. Growing ever poorer, they will respond by being perennially angry with 'government' and jealous of those who are wealthier. Politically, they will become more paranoid, intolerant, isolationist, aggressive, demanding and self-serving (i.e., 'conservative').

I envision many of most assertive of the 'D' Generation fleeing from the major cities only to resettle in (and overpopulate) smaller rural communities where land (and hence, food) may be more accessible. Inevitably, theft and violence will increase as these migrating, impoverished urban refugees struggle to stay alive by preying on established resource-holders and each other. Moreover, in the absence of today's engines of education, scientific knowledge will progressively yield to mysticism. New religions will congeal around new gods akin to the *flying spaghetti monster*.

If we choose, we can observe this oncoming scenario by examining the current lifestyles in other overpopulated and environmentally-devastated countries where the energy, land and natural resources have been degraded far beyond sustainability. In fact, those of the 'D' Generation might well study, while there is still time, how these populations have or are adapting to their environmental constraints. But, emerging today in the fool's paradise our consumerist economy has spawned, the 'D' Generation will find it difficult, if not impossible, to envision a future of economic decline.

Continued Waste of Energy Resources

Why do I presume this will happen? To start, even though it appears to be no secret that the world is rapidly running out of cheap energy (simply, ask the ~~oil~~ energy companies; e.g., *Beyond Petroleum*), I believe our society will struggle furiously to sustain our car-oriented, commuter lifestyle despite the burden of its inordinate consumption of fossil fuel (an estimated 400 years of stored accumulation burned per day). To compound that addiction, the U.S. will continue to subsidize the development of expansive suburban mega-

mansions and strip malls until all the resources necessary for a prudent transition to a sustainable life-style are beyond our (or any) nation's economic reach.

For example, what is the likelihood that Columbia (or Kansas City or ...) can mobilize the necessary public support to establish an comprehensive, energy-efficient mass transit system? Instead, will an intransigent citizenry continue to demand the extension and widening of roads plus the construction of more parking garages so that increasing legions of cars can be driven ever-greater distances from former farm land to be idled and stored by day in the central city? Instead of considering more efficient transportation alternatives for a progressively energy-starved world, our shortsighted Missouri highway engineers have advocated committing our precious residual capital resources to the widening of I-70 across the State.

National Debt

A second major factor that will contribute to the 'D' Generation's predestined economic decline is the U.S. government's inexorable road to bankruptcy. In part, this will be result of rampant borrowing to avoid shouldering the cost burdens of our expensive wars to promote freedom and democracy. Concurrently, it will derive from reducing government income during times of prosperity by providing politically-popular tax cuts. Our nation's escalating interest payments to foreign countries (largely, our current allies, China and Japan) will ensure that a ever-growing share of America's future income will flow abroad so that our own government will have little or no

money available to spend on critical future domestic infrastructure needs, either presently unknown or, more likely, simply unforeseen.

The Reality of Malthus and the Limits to Growth

As a consequence, the 'D' Generation's population should, of necessity, shrink to the new level of sustainability of quality of human life afforded by the nation's residual energy and material resources. One can only imagine that this will be a very ugly transition marked by exurban migration, Balkanization, lawlessness, starvation, all supplemented by internecine ethnic, religious and sectarian wars.

That is my vision for our 'D' Generation's future -- in Columbia, in the U.S., and in the world.

Finally, to summarize this concept for the management of Columbia's visioning groups:

Plan for getting poorer!

Hope this helps with our municipal planning!

Love, Dad

AUGUST, 2007



Last Man in Limbo



The Last Man in Limbo

Heather,

I feared it might happen sooner or later. I believe I am now (all but officially) condemned to hell.

For many years, I clung to the desperate hope that I would, at least, be assigned to *Limbo* (in Roman Catholic theology, the ‘edge’ of hell; in the Divine Comedy, the ‘*first circle of hell*’ located beyond the river, Acheron, but before the judgment seat of Minos.) (Get out your GPS!)

However, on April 22, 2007, the advisory body known as the *International Theological Commission* released a document, whose publication was subsequently authorized by *Pope Benedict XVI*, indicating that “*one of the opinions that the Catholic Church does not condemn*” (thus allowing it to be held by its members) is that the theory of Limbo “*remains a possible theological opinion*”. This timorous papal ‘allowance’ does not strike me as a ringing endorsement of the existence of Limbo. Even now, I can see the flames dancing on the walls of my prospective sanctuary.

I’ll miss Limbo! There’s still Purgatory, but I suspect that I would require far more purification (particularly, for my liver) than can be administered in that happy way station to Heaven.

As all true believers know, everyone has got to go somewhere, but I hate the idea of going to hell. For one thing, I think it is going to be very crowded, smelly, and the ventilation will be poor ... a lot like the New York City subway. Worse, many self-styled *conservatives* will likely be around, although it will probably give me some comfort to see them there.

Since I’m Going Anyway ...

My fate foretold, I now feel enfranchised to raise some questions that have been troubling me about our ‘*one true religion*’ that I would otherwise have studiously avoided engaging.

- I'm still not sure I really want to know, but what were the sexual orientations and interactions of the immediate descendants of Adam and Eve. Kissin' cousins? Would they have been jailed in Alabama? How did they keep procreating for nine hundred years in the absence of Viagra?
- Instead of creating Jesus from scratch, why did God make him crawl out of some virgin like Mary? And wasn't Mary at risk of being stoned to death if folks thought she was bearing a child out of wedlock instead of bearing God's spawn? Why didn't God just nab another rib from some guy?
- What was the point of letting Jesus die, then, giving him a few extra days of life? Did he need to find a good Jewish lawyer to help get his affairs in order?
- The Great Flood and the Ark? What a mess? Talk about water pollution! Wouldn't it have been simpler and cleaner just to dispatch everyone and everything in the world, then, create a brand new, unspoiled population? Surely, God didn't lose the blueprints. As it turns out, our post-flood population hasn't turned out so well anyhow.
- Is God the product of intelligent design? Was he (and not she) created in the image of man (and more particularly, hairy old guys like me?) Most people seem to picture Him as male, old, and bearded. I assume from all the famous Italian paintings that His son was a white man with features rather like mine. It makes one wonder who one sees when they look in the mirror?

· Most would agree that one of the greatest gifts that any God can confer on a mortal is eternal life. Death itself is a downer. Not many of us really long for oblivion. However, as Christian believers, we are awarded this gift -- whether we want it or not. The irony for most of the 6 billion *souls* populating today's earth is that our eternal afterlife will be spent in hell. Bummer.

· Up to this time, women don't seem to have made out too well in most religions. Was this because men wrote the religious tracts and made up the rules? When is someone going to invent a female God and what will she make men wear to preserve their chastity?

Yup, I'm going to hell!

See you there!

Love, Dad

... heaven for climate, and hell for society.

Mark Twain, Tammany and Croker speech

We may not doubt that society in heaven consists mainly of undesirable persons.

Mark Twain's Notebook

Heaven goes by favor. If it went by merit, you would stay out and your dog would go in.

Mark Twain, a Biography

MAY, 2008



Memorial Day



Memorial Day - 2008

Heather,

On television this morning, defending our internal spying program, a U.S. Senator reminded Americans that *we are a nation at war*. Sobering news. I know *I* had forgotten. However, particularly since it is Memorial Day, it started me thinking about the sacrifices Americans have made over the past five years and are continuing to make to bring peace, freedom, and democracy to Iraq.

The sacrifices are quantified, seemingly with decreasing frequency as the war plods on, as we are presented with the counts of dead and wounded men and women. In an accounting directed at our more materialistic side, we are also updated with disparate estimates of the out-of-pocket costs of our nation's determination to defeat terrorism and bring democracy to the middle East.

Still, it occurred to me that something very important is missing from our balance sheet. That is the incremental cost of life for each day lost to those who labor to conduct our military expeditions.

Primarily, this cost is being paid by those military personnel in the danger zones. We understand that they number about 150,000 and are generally young, perhaps averaging 25 years old. (The actual numbers are probably classified since, if the enemy knew, it might endanger their lives.) If we trust that most of these young people will *not* be killed in this war, but live to an average of 75 years, then they have 50 years (or 18,250 days) of life to look forward to in the comfort, safety, and security of their American homes.

Still, loss of life can be measured in days. For every day that 150,000 American troops remain at war, this equals the consumption of $150,000/18,250$ or 8.2 of their residual life expectancies. Over five years, this grinding daily consumption would total 15,000.

As painful as that number appears, I believe the national sacrifice is far greater. Many more people than most of us can fully appreciate are engaged in supporting our war effort. The efforts of the vital medical personnel are most evident, but hundreds of thousands more Americans are involved in training,

supporting, transporting, and supplying our troops. While not as glamorous, even those involved in manufacturing munitions, materiel, and Hummers are devoting substantial portions of their lives to a war effort with no discernible end.

Not to disparage their gratuitous contributions, it sometimes appears that there have been innumerable news reporters, freelance writers, filmmakers, war tourists, and politicians '*on the ground*' in Iraq. In total, the gross consumption of human life, energy resources, and sacrifice are, perhaps thankfully, incalculable.

Calculator cleared, on this Memorial Day, I can't erase the most searing images of the sacrifices made to war; the unbridled tears and pain of those who have lost their loved ones. How much are the remaining days of one's life diminished when war has brought death to one's threshold? Of what diminished value are days filled with mourning, regret, and sadness?

Love, Dad



When I Die



‘When I Die ...’

Happy 78th Birthday to me, Heather,

According to various life expectancy estimates, I may live to age 89 (National Vital Statistic Reports, U.S.); 93 (University of Pennsylvania); or 97 (MSN Money). That last estimate, which would have you wait, at least, another 19 years for your inheritance, strikes fear into my heart. So, let’s go with the 11 year estimate after which you will only be eligible for AARP membership rather than Social Security.

Of course, I could shorten my life expectancy by spending more time working crossword puzzles by the light of a large-screen, flat panel television instead of jogging. I could drink white wine, smoke Cuban cigars, increase my intake of trans-fats, and relocate to *sprawling estates*, the new suburban development with a maze of cul-de-sacs designed to make walking and exercising as easy as taking a twenty-minute drive to our new, fully-enclosed, multi-million dollar Recreation Center. In addition, the stress and hazard of driving into and out of this low-walkability enclave may also help shorten my days of exhaling (or otherwise expelling) greenhouse gases.

Still, my foreseeable demise has me worried. What should you do with my carcass? I've never really liked the fatal atmosphere of wakes, viewings, caskets, visitations, funeral homes, funeral directors, morticians, funeral urns, obituary notices, the odor of embalming fluid, crematoria, churches, pews, incense, officiating clergy, organs, hymns, soloists, eulogies, testimonials, prayers, somber music, dirges, receiving lines, heartfelt condolences, guest books, hearses, processions, pallbearers, graveyards, shrouds, vaults, crypts, tombs, sepulchres, markers, headstones, plastic flowers, ... Black is not my color.

Assuming that our community will not have progressed to *curbside pickup* over the next decade, what are our options? If incineration for supplemental power production is the most *environmentally friendly* method, that is my choice. And if, for some reason, it is illegal to dispose of my ashes directly to the primary settling basin at the wastewater treatment plant, then, simply flush them down the toilet. I suspect my ash will be too alkaline to make good plant fertilizer.

While I would regret your having to waste your modest inheritance in support of the death industry, I wouldn't mind your blowing it on a truly memorable celebration. Knowing your skills in planning such events, I will leave all the decisions to you, but I am thinking of something like an all-day-long open bar and pizza party. I envision happy music, a casual atmosphere, laughter, -- a gathering of good friends -- some of whom I actually knew.

Wish I could join you.

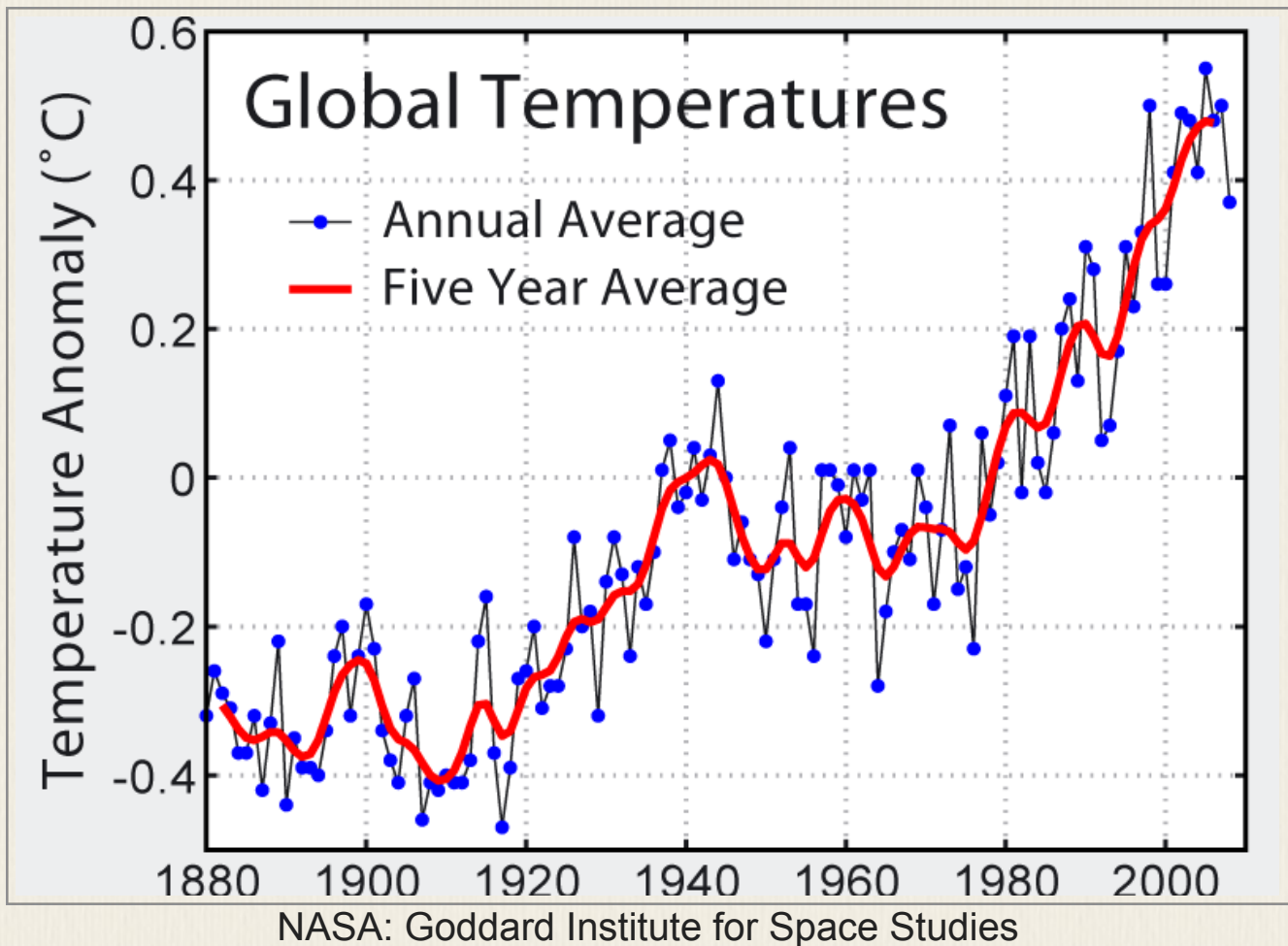
Love, Dad

Heather writes back:

Dad - Let's have the party now instead of later.



Global Climate



Anthropogenic Global Climate Change

Heather.

Before joining in the national political sport of name calling, backbiting, and sloganeering, the first question that one should clinically address is: *'are human activities responsible for the observed increases in world temperatures over the past century?'* (There is no real question that the earth is warming.

Some really competent members of the human race, now with the help of earth-orbiting satellites, have gotten very good at measuring temperature.)

I am not qualified to answer that pivotal question. I am not even in the game. To really be *‘in the game’*, one must actually examine historical data, read volumes of pertinent technical literature, develop and test one’s own mathematically-based hypotheses, and, finally, publish the results of one’s models in peer-reviewed scientific literature where it can be challenged and, possibly, refuted. (From a strictly scientific standpoint, those who cannot or will not sacrifice the time required to formulate the problem in this fashion might be considered dilettantes, somewhat like the loud and shirtless fans criticizing the action at a football game.)

Instead, in our democratic society, even with questions of this magnitude and complexity, we are inclined to put them to a public referendum. Pundits abound. Scientific illiteracy is no barrier. Even the third graders at elementary school may voice their opinions for the media.

For a politician, a decisively held opinion on the matter of global warming is essential. (Often, for self-described conservatives and others dreading the economic impacts of mitigation, the answer to an anthropomorphic warming component is a genetically-ingrained and resounding “No!”)

Still, some concerned scientists and engineers have joined together to give the matter serious thought. After consideration, the American Chemical Society (at 129,000 members, the world’s largest scientific society) published their study group’s consensus in an ACS policy statement entitled, *Global Climate Change*.

In calling for the development and application of technology to “cost-effectively (most ACS members are keenly aware of the costs of energy and materials production) *protect the climate*”, the ACS policy statement argues that “*deploying these technologies would reduce energy costs, increase productivity, improve the U.S.’s energy independence, improve air and water quality, and reduce environmental hazards, **in addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.***” (Considering the multiple ancillary benefits, one might imagine that government sponsorship of the application of these technologies would be welcomed even were greenhouse gases not reduced.)

Addressing the probable impact of human activities, the ACS policy statement concludes: “*The overwhelming balance of evidence indicates that reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the prudent and responsible course of action at this time.*” Moreover, “*ACS believes that public and private efforts today are essential to protect the global climate system for the well-being of future generations.*”

However, pursuing a prudent and responsible course of action in America is difficult because, when facing a national policy involving a change in lifestyle (particularly, conservation), many U.S. citizens do not respond as ‘*Americans*’. Some super-elevate the economic interests of their state; some consider solely those of their city; others, still more narrowly, of an individual business or university; while the meanest among us defend our interests alone.

To the besieged administrator who adopts his primary accounting stance as ‘*defender of the university budget*’ (rather than the future economic welfare of the nation), it might seem reasonable to not only oppose any measures

which threaten to increase the financial burdens on the university, but, further, to argue that the problem is debatable -- and may not even exist.

It has always struck me as especially odd that many of the those who most enjoy the prosperity brought by modern technology (and who also have faith that future technological developments will overcome current material and sociological problems, such as those created by uninhibited population growth), will turn to vilify that community of technologists when confronted with a message they prefer not to hear.

That seems a lot easier to do when you are not in the game.

Love, Dad