



The Desert Sun

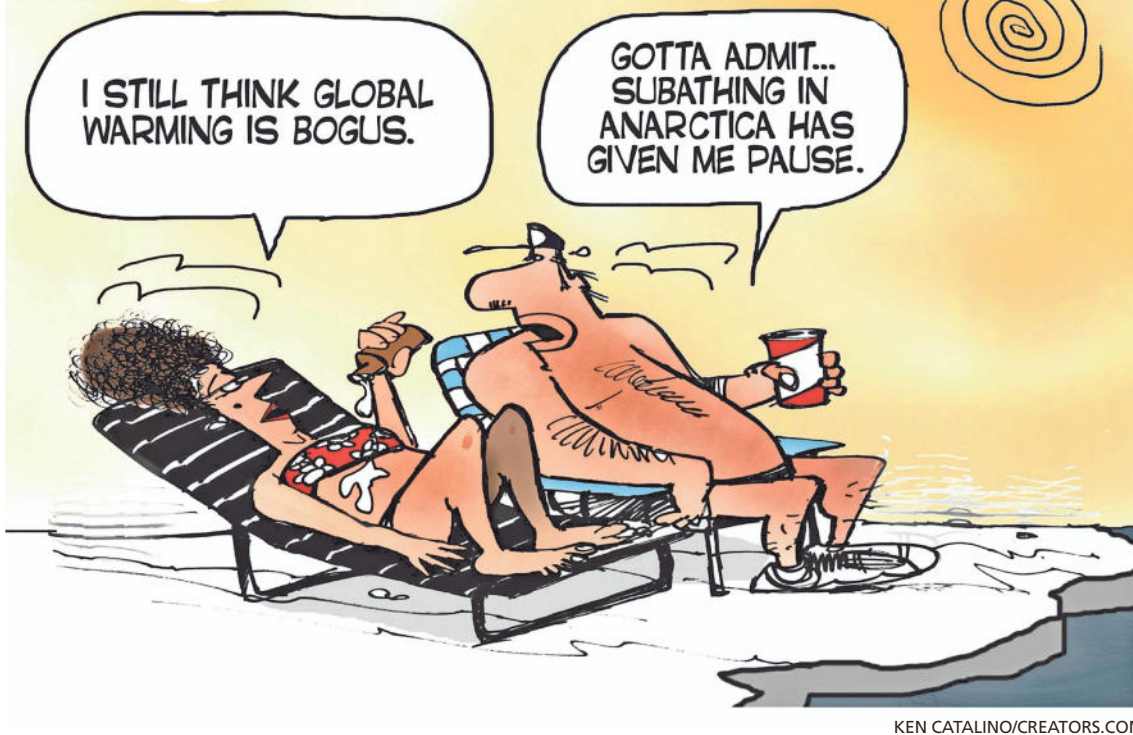
OPINION

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

AL FRANCO, ENGAGEMENT EDITOR/OPINION, (760) 778-4727 OR AL.FRANCO@DESERTSUN.COM

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Republicans stoking the fires of bigotry on campaign trail

What is the proper response from a prospective president to the question: Is being a Muslim disqualifying for the presidency?

Ben Carson answered that he "would not advocate that we put a Muslim in charge of this nation" because Islam is incompatible with the Constitution. The Constitution offers a different reply: "No religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."

What is the right answer from a presidential candidate to the question: Is being an adherent of Hinduism — which in some nationalist versions is politically oppressive and anti-Muslim — disqualifying for the presidency? The proper response: "No religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."



Michael Gerson

What of practicing Buddhism, a faith that has Theravada followers in Myanmar who stoke ethnic and religious hatred? What of following Mormonism, a faith that once had semi-theocratic dominance of Utah and was in armed revolution against the federal government from May 1857 until July 1858? What of Catholicism, a version of which was employed to justify the murder of Protestants in Ireland?

The proper answer to all: While voters can make individual judgments about qualifications for the presidency, no one can be barred from running or serving because of his or her religion. No religious test shall ever be required.

And what of an evangelical Christian who rejects evolution and traces the roots of radical Islam back to "the battle between Jacob and Esau"? This is where Carson and some other evangelicals show an astounding lack of self-consciousness. Carson argues that Muslims are unfit for high office because they hold a conception of divine law that is inconsistent with a liberal, democratic order. A significant portion of the country would disqualify Carson for exactly the same reason.

Because of the Supreme Court's decision on same-sex marriage, conservative Christians are currently (and appropriately) focused on the defense of religious liberty. But how is it psy-

chologically possible to combine a zeal for pluralism with such overt prejudice against one faith? Imagine an evangelical participating in a protest against the siting of a mosque. Now imagine him going across the street to a rally in favor of religious freedom. Wouldn't the sign he carries have to be altered pretty dramatically?

The response of some evangelicals is that Islam is different — that it is inherently oriented toward violent jihad and the imposition of a seventh-century version of Shariah law. This is a theological claim, which is also made by al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

I sincerely doubt that Ben Carson and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi are the best authorities to interpret 1,400 years of Islamic theological reflection and political practice. The overwhelming majority of Muslim scholars and Muslims in the world would disagree with their interpretation, as would nearly all American Muslims.

Yet American Muslims see candidates on the main stage of American politics asserting that the worst, most ugly interpretation of their faith is the only correct one. The same could be done to Hindus, Buddhists, Mormons, Catholics or evangelicals. It would be unfair in every case.

This is not to deny that some religious traditions have a more difficult history when it comes to the separation of divine law from human law. It is, on balance, easier to have a healthy suspicion of the state when your founder was a judicially murdered itinerant preacher who said to turn the other cheek. But even this did not prevent the wars of religion following the Protestant Reformation that flattened much of Europe (and were the bloodiest until World War I). Every religious tradition has the temptation of tribalism. It is overcome by calling people to the best of their traditions.

Carson, Donald Trump and other Republican candidates need to step back a moment and consider what they are doing. By targeting various groups for suspicion they are opening up a space for some of the worst elements of our society. A questioner at the Trump town hall began, "We have a problem in this country. It's called Muslims." People once on the political fringes now feel part of the national conversation. Trump will look into their views. Carson concurs with their fears.

What gain or goal is worth the cost of breathing life into bigotry?

Michael Gerson's email address is michaelgerson@washpost.com.

VALLEY VOICE

Colorado River rights serve valley well as long-term water plan

On June 5 The Desert Sun published a story about Coachella Valley water that included this one-sentence paragraph: "But banking on the Colorado is a dangerous long-term plan."

No substitute is put forth by The Desert Sun to the valley's use of river water. The reason is simple: There is no alternative.

In 1919 valley pioneers realized this and entered into a contract for the rights to import Colorado River water for irrigation, thereby saving the valley's groundwater for urban use.

The truth is that our Colorado River rights, combined with our vast aquifer and water conservation efforts, make the Eastern Coachella Valley the envy of the Southwestern U.S.

Simply put, banking on the Colorado River has been our long-term plan for 100 years, and it continues to serve us well. Water well levels are rising in the eastern Coachella Valley as the aquifer is restored with increasing deliveries of river water.

There has never been a shortage declaration on the Colorado, and the chance of one happening in 2016 is zero. The chance for a shortage declaration in 2017 is less than 20 percent.

Even with a shortage declaration, the Coachella Valley will receive 100 percent of its contracted rights. The agencies that rely on the river, including CVWD, are working together to further reduce the likelihood of a shortage and are making a difference to raise the water level in Lake Mead, even in a time of drought.

Contrast this with California's State Water Project (SWP) that went from overflowing to empty in only a few years, and which delivered a meager 5 percent last year, and only 20 percent this year. The Western Coachella Valley relies on SWP deliveries to replenish the aquifer.

Since river water first arrived to our valley in 1949 the successors of those early pioneers have worked to



Blaine Carian

improve the infrastructure related to all phases of water distribution and conservancy. This has included building replenishment ponds for underground water recharge, concrete lining of the Coachella portion of the canal to avoid seepage, reclamation of sewage for beneficial use and expansion of the distribution system so more users can access river water.

The water that was secured by the farming community in 1919 created a thriving agricultural industry. With the careful use of this water other industries have emerged. Tourism has now supplanted agriculture as the valley's number one industry, closely followed by health care and real estate development. All of these industries can trace their growth to a reliable source of water.

Residents of our valley should understand the true value of our aquifer and our Colorado River rights. We all rely on this water, and must make its sustainable use a top priority that we are prepared to fight for.

In order to provide an accurate portrayal of the valley's use of river water, a group of businesses formed a nonprofit organization called Growing Coachella Valley. We have created a web site (<http://growingcoachellavalley.org/>) with resources about water in the Coachella Valley; there is a link from the web site to a Facebook page where current information will be posted.

Blaine Carian of Bermuda Dunes is co-owner of Desert Fresh, Inc. and serves as the chair of local not-for-profit Growing Coachella Valley. Email him at blaine@growingcoachellavalley.org.

SHARE YOUR VIEWS

The Desert Sun welcomes guest columns addressing local political and social issues.

General guidelines include:

- » Columns should be 500 to 550 words.
- » We print the author's photo and contact info (typically an email address) with the column.
- » Anonymous columns are never published.
- » Stick to a single topic and avoid personal attacks.
- » We reserve the right to edit and republish (including electronically) all columns.

Direct column submissions and questions to Al Franco, engagement editor/opinion, at al.franco@desertsun.com

YOUR VOICE

Focus on the ammunition

Re: "All our children deserve to receive firearm education," Valley Voice, Sept. 18

It's not the guns that create havoc in our communities, it's the bullets.

While I agree that there should be a standardized, across-the-nation, background check on buying weapons, the real criminals would never purchase their weapons through the system. What we need is bullet control.

How about we conduct background checks for anyone buying bullets? Or we could price the ammo at, say \$1000 per bullet?

Kathryn Knoche, La Quinta
Skip Descant's front-page article, "Lawn Conversion: Landscapes for a changing world," is very timely and will be an inspiration to valley residents wanting to convert to desert landscape.

Some homeowners in HOAs want to convert but are



A Desert Sun reader suggests tighter control over ammunition sales to help end gun violence.

blocked by other homeowners and/or the board. The Desert Horticultural Society of the Coachella Valley is featuring a class on this very topic at Desert Garden Community Day, Saturday, Oct. 17, at The Living Desert: "HOA Conversion to a Desert Landscape: The Balancing Act Between Turf and Turf Removal." The presenter, Cathy Cieslikowski of RGA

Landscape Architects, Inc., will give strategies and information on the many benefits that can come with turf removal.

For more information on this free event and the full day's schedule go to deserthorticulturalsociety.org. Again, thank you Desert Sun for helping us all work together to conserve our most precious resource.

Mary Brent Wehrli, Palm Springs

Ruiz is encouraging peace with Iran decision

I am very happy to see Congressman Dr. Raul Ruiz has decided to vote in favor of the deal with Iran. I have no issue with his time frame in reaching such an important decision. The deal needed to be fully understood. Is it perfect? No. Is it the right thing to do? Yes.

As a veteran who served in Vietnam, I am always happy to

see events that might encourage peace after that dark time in our history. I am glad we are making strides to settle longstanding issues with Iran.

Not all Iranians are terrorists nor are all people in the Middle East hell-bent on destroying America or its citizens. Americans are killing other Americans every day.

Congressman Ruiz, congratulations on reaching what I believe to be the right decision. I know you process all aspects of anything that requires your vote and attention. Keep up the good work!

Tom Weeks, Palm Springs

Just one man's opinion?

Re: "Open Letter to Ruiz," Valley Voice by Donald Prell, Sept. 12

Mr. Prell commended Congressman Ruiz for his clarity and logic in reaching his decision regarding the Iran Deal in his Viewpoint piece. Ruiz explained in his View-

point column that his decision was evidence-based and not based on partisanship or politics.

Mr. Prell claims that Ruiz should have voted the way his constituents wanted, implying that the majority are against it.

How did Mr. Prell come up with this statistic? What source did he use to substantiate this fact?

Or, might this be just one man's opinion?

Marlene Levine, La Quinta

SEND YOUR LETTER

Email letters to letters@desertsun.com

- » Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number for verification
- » Letters should be fewer than 200 words
- » Letters may be edited for length, clarity and taste

See a complete list of rules online.