

from our viewpoint...

DNA testing promises to tell more about offspring

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Newport has opulent summer homes

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

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

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

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

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

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

Or you can take the train.

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

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

The itinerary included visits to two Newport mansions built by heirs to the Vanderbilt rail-



cynthia haynes

• open season

road fortune, a visit to the vineyard and a tour of the Tennis Hall of Fame.

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

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

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

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

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

The place looks hard and cold, and since Alva divorced ol' Wille, kept the house and married his best friend a few years later, I'm

thinking maybe it wasn't a happy home.

The other house we visited was the Breakers, the crown jewel of historic Newport homes. Built by Cornelius Vanderbilt II between 1893 and 1895, the Breakers is enormous.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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e-mail: star.news@nwkansas.com

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nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(nt.betz@nwkansas.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. (support@nwkansas.com)

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The Bush tax cuts: 10 years of disaster

This month marks the tenth anniversary of the first of the two tax cuts sought by the President George Bush. The Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act was enacted in 2001 to be followed, in 2003, by the Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Reconciliation Act.

Ten years later, it is time we assess the actual results of these tax cuts, looking at economic performance rather than political promises. The results have been a disaster for the U.S. economy and for almost all of the American people. We have experienced very slow income and employment growth for the vast majority of families, an extremely unequal distribution of the direct financial benefits from these measures, and, very slow growth in the economy as a whole.

As someone who has personally received these tax cuts during the past 10 years, I feel it is my responsibility to speak out.

Supporters of tax cuts for high income households, such as House majority leader John Boehner, argue wealthy people are the "job creators" and tax cuts will encourage them to create jobs and these new jobs will, in turn, increase employment opportunities and improve the wages of the remainder of the population.

Did any of these benefits occur after the Bush tax cuts? The quick and accurate answer is, no, they did not. Adjusted for inflation, the median weekly earnings of working Americans actually fell by 2.3 percent from the end of the 2000-01 recession to the onset of the Great Recession. This is unique in the post WWII period. Further, the recovery from the 2000-01 recession was the slowest of any post WWII recession to date, requiring 39 months before the number of employed Americans reached the pre-recession level.

Where is even a scintilla of evidence tax cuts such as those passed in 2001 and 2003 generate income and employment growth for the vast majority of the population?



from other pens

• commentary

A significant part of the failure of the Bush tax cuts to generate jobs and income growth flows from the top-heavy distribution of the benefits conveyed by these measures. The vast bulk of the reduced taxes were reaped by a very small number of families.

In 2011, the average tax reduction to families receiving an income of \$1 million or more (about 321,000 families) will be \$139,199. For this less than 0.5 percent of all families this is a reduction in taxes of \$860 million/week. Compare these tax benefits to the yearly savings proposed by cutting the WIC program: \$833 million.

An obvious question is, why can't this very small group of extremely high income families give up just one week of their tax cut to provide nutrition for the tens of thousands of women and children that benefit from the WIC program? More significantly, in light of the deficit hysteria gripping Washington D.C., the combined impact of the 2001 and 2003 Bush tax cuts has been the addition of more than \$2.6 trillion to the federal debt. This included more than \$400 billion in interest payments on the debt necessary to pay for the cuts.

Of course, one might forgive these policy failures if the promise of economic growth had been fulfilled. On this measure, however, the record is even worse. The 2000-01 recession ended in the fourth quarter of 2001, just in time for the first Bush tax cut to take effect.

From the end of the recession until the onset of the Great Recession, the economy grew at a slower rate than in any other post recession period since WWII. Thus, despite promises from the advocates of the tax cuts, the reality

was slower growth rather than faster growth. The additional tax cut in 2003 did nothing to increase the pace of economic growth.

In sum, the Bush tax cuts were a bad idea at the time and are an even worse idea today. Ending these cuts for incomes over \$250,000 would generate over \$100 billion a year in additional revenue. If we also created additional tax rates for very high-income families (e.g. at \$500,000, \$1,000,000, \$5,000,000 and \$10,000,000) we could increase federal revenue by more than double that amount and put us on the road to reducing deficits and debts.

Dr. William Barclay worked for 22 years in financial service before retiring in 2004. He is an adjunct professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago in the Liautaud Graduate School of Business and is a member of Wealth for the Common Good.

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