

August 18, 2014

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**Mark Steyn** gives an update on his lawsuit with Michael Mann. Turns out he has lots of new allies in the ACLU, WaPo, and other media outlets as they all have come to see the danger to them should Mann prevail. As always, Steyn leaves no prisoners. *I can't claim to know what's inside Mann's overheated head. Perhaps he genuinely believes he's a Nobel Laureate who's been exonerated by Sir Muir Russell and Lord Oxburgh and NOAA and the British Government and everybody else. But his lawyers - even the ideologues, like Peter Fontaine - can't plead self-delusion. As officers of the court, they're obliged to do what Steve calls "due diligence". Mann has played fast and loose with the facts all his adult life. If I were his counsel, I would be double-checking everything he tells me.*

*Given the procedural bollocks the disgraceful Judge Combs Greene made of this case, my preference since December has been to go to trial as soon as possible. I've responded to Mann's discovery requests on me, and I'd like him to reciprocate and undergo deposition. I think it would be better, both for my own case and the law in general, for him to lose at trial, and I'd like to get there sooner rather than later. All that said, I am modestly heartened by how this case is going, and by the way Mann's behavior is being seen for what it is. I would especially like to thank SteynOnline readers from around the world who've supported this pushback against a vexatious litigant and prodigious liar by buying my books, gift certificates, exclusive trial merchandise, and even my Christmas disco CD over at the Steyn store. You kept us in the game at a very difficult time when the conventional wisdom was that Mann was cruising to victory, and you enabled me to hire a first-rate free-speech legal team that, like me, is itching to get on with deposition and discovery.*

*He might still win, of course. Given the ghastly misapplication of the law by Judge Combs Greene, one would be foolish to rule out any possibility in this so-called justice system. My plan in such an eventuality was to put a false beard over my real beard, flee jurisdiction, and undergo reconstructive surgery somewhere where they do a nice job, like Switzerland. However, as I said to Hugh Hewitt on the radio today, it's clear that what's changed is that the major media and human-rights groups now recognize that Mann's suit is a serious threat to their freedom. As the ACLU/Big Media brief puts it:*

*"While Mann essentially claims that he can silence critics because he is "right," the judicial system should not be the arbiter of either scientific truth or correct public policy. While a mici may not necessarily agree with the content of defendants' speech, they believe that, if left to stand, the decision below will chill the expression of opinion on a wide range of important scientific and public policy issues, and therefore urge that it be reversed."*

*So, even if he did win in DC court, we'd be pushing on, if necessary all the way to the Supreme Court. And in the end he will lose, and lose big - because the alternative would be the worst setback for the First Amendment in half-a-century.*

**Kevin Williamson** says thanks to Mayor de Blasio, New York City's squeegee men are making a comeback.

*The Squeegee Man was the personification of old, dysfunctional, pre-Giuliani New York City. These guys were extortion artists, who would "help" motorists stuck in clogged automotive arteries, such as those leading to the Lincoln Tunnel, by forcing their unsolicited windshield-cleaning services on them and then demanding payment, the demand generally being accompanied by verbal abuse or the threat of violence — and, occasionally, with actual violence. Squeegee Man symbolized the disorder and lawlessness of New York life — not a murderer or a rapist, just one of the many lower-level hassles and terrors that made the city so unbearable back in what some insist on remembering as the good ol' days of crack addicts and hookers on Times Square.*

*Squeegee Man is making a comeback, both in his traditional form — as documented by the New York Post — and in a new, mutant form: Sunday Hijacker. Sunday Hijacker is cleverer and more cynical than his predecessor, and his modus operandi is to make a scene inside a church during worship until somebody pays him to go away. Screaming, knocking over furnishings, and threatening violence are his shtick.*

*On Sunday, I was at Mass at a congregation with whom I sometimes worship (Catholic liturgy on Park Avenue — that's a National Review Sunday, missing only the tying of a soft-shackle Edwards), and was intrigued by one of the announcements at the end of the service: Parishioners were asked to call 9-1-1 if they were threatened inside the church or on the church grounds by people demanding money. We were implored to make a donation to one of the many Catholic charities caring for the homeless instead of complying with vagrants' demands for cash. The police, parishioners were assured, had been contacted, and they had promised to pay extra attention to the church. ...*

And, a [Wall Street Journal OpEd](#) says recommended salt levels may do more harm than good.

*A long-running debate over the merits of eating less salt escalated Wednesday when one of the most comprehensive studies yet suggested cutting back on sodium too much actually poses health hazards.*

*Current guidelines from U.S. government agencies, the World Health Organization, the American Heart Association and other groups set daily dietary sodium targets between 1,500 and 2,300 milligrams or lower, well below the average U.S. daily consumption of about 3,400 milligrams.*

*The new study, which tracked more than 100,000 people from 17 countries over an average of more than three years, found that those who consumed fewer than 3,000 milligrams of sodium a day had a 27% higher risk of death or a serious event such as a heart attack or stroke in that period than those whose intake was estimated at 3,000 to 6,000 milligrams. Risk of death or other major events increased with intake above 6,000 milligrams.*

*The findings, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, are the latest to challenge the benefit of aggressively low sodium targets—especially for generally healthy people. Last year, [a report from the Institute of Medicine](#), which advises Congress on health issues, didn't find evidence that cutting sodium intake below 2,300 milligrams reduced risk of cardiovascular disease.*

*The new report has shortcomings, and as an observational study it found only an association, not a causative effect, between very low sodium and cardiovascular risk. Still, it spurred calls to reconsider the targets. This "adds a pretty big weight on the side that low salt intake is associated with harm," said Suzanne Oparil, professor of medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and an expert on high blood pressure. Without evidence from randomized trials to back them up, the low-sodium targets are "questionable health policy," she said. Dr. Oparil was author of an editorial that accompanied the findings.*

*"It's about time that major groups who are making recommendations on sodium take a more measured approach," said Salim Yusuf of the Population Health Research Institute, or PHRI, at McMaster University in Ontario and senior author of two papers on the new study.*

*The American Heart Association, a strong proponent of the low-sodium targets, isn't persuaded.*

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## Washington Post

### On Obama's foreign policy, Clinton got it right

by Charles Krauthammer

*“Great nations need organizing principles, and ‘Don’t do stupid stuff’ is not an organizing principle.”*

— Hillary Clinton, The Atlantic, Aug. 10

Leave it to Barack Obama's own former secretary of state [to acknowledge the fatal flaw](#) of his foreign policy: a total absence of strategic thinking.

Yes, of course everything Hillary Clinton says is positioning. The last time she sought the nomination (2008), as she admitted before Defense Secretary Bob Gates, she opposed the Iraq surge for political reasons because she was facing antiwar Sen. Barack Obama in Iowa. Now, as she prepares for her next run (2016), she's positioning herself to the right because, with no prospect of being denied the Democratic nomination, she has the luxury of running toward the center two years before Election Day.

All true, but sincere or not — with the Clintons how can you ever tell? — it doesn't matter. She's right.

Mind you, Obama does deploy grand words proclaiming grand ideas: the “new beginning” with Islam declared in Cairo, the [reset with Russia](#) announced in Geneva, global nuclear disarmament proclaimed in Prague (and playacted in a Washington summit). But, untethered from reality, they all disappeared without a trace.

When carrying out policies in the real world, however, it's nothing but tactics and reactive improvisation. The only consistency is the president's inability (unwillingness?) to see the big picture. Consider:

#### 1. *Russia*

Vladimir Putin has 45,000 troops on the Ukraine border. A convoy of 262 unwanted, unrequested, uninspected Russian trucks allegedly with humanitarian aid [is headed to Ukraine](#) to relieve the pro-Russian separatists now reduced to the encircled cities of Donetsk and Luhansk. Ukraine threatens to stop it.

Obama's concern? He blithely tells [the New York Times that Putin](#) “could invade” Ukraine at any time. And if he does, says Obama, “trying to find our way back to a cooperative functioning relationship with Russia during the remainder of my term will be much more difficult.”

Is this what Obama worries about? A Russian invasion would be a singular violation of the post-Cold War order, a humiliating demonstration of American helplessness and a shock to the Baltic republics, Poland and other vulnerable U.S. allies. And Obama is concerned about his post-invasion relations with Putin?

#### 2. *Syria*

To this day, Obama seems not to understand the damage he did to American credibility everywhere by [slinking away](#) from his own self-proclaimed red line on Syrian use of chemical weapons.

He seems equally unaware of the message sent by his refusal to arm the secular opposition ([over the objections](#) of Secretary of State Clinton, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and CIA Director David Petraeus) when it was still doable. He ridicules the idea as “fantasy” because we’d be arming amateurs up against a well-armed government “backed by Russia, backed by Iran [and] a battle-hardened Hezbollah.”

He thus admits that Russian and other outside support was crucial to tilting the outcome of this civil war to Bashar al-Assad. Yet he dismisses countervailing U.S. support as useless. He thus tells the world of his disdain for the traditional U.S. role of protecting friends by deterring and counterbalancing adversarial outside powers.

### 3. Gaza

Every moderate U.S. ally in the Middle East welcomed the original (week 1) [Egyptian cease-fire offer](#). They were stunned when the Obama’s secretary of state then met with Qatar and Turkey — Hamas’ lawyers — promoting its demands. Did Obama not understand he was stymieing a tacit and remarkable pan-Arab-Israeli alliance to bring down Hamas (a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood) — itself an important U.S. strategic objective?

The definitive evidence of Obama’s lack of vision is his own current policy reversals — a clear admission of failure. He backed the next Egyptian cease-fire. He’s finally arming the Syrian rebels. And he’s [returning American military power to Iraq](#). (On Russia, however, he appears unmovably unmoved.)

Tragically, his [proposed \\$500 million package](#) for secular Syrian rebels is too late. Assad has Aleppo, their last major redoubt, nearly surrounded. If and when it falls, the revolution may be over.

The result? The worst possible outcome: A land divided between the Islamic State (IS) and Assad, now wholly owned by Iran and Russia.

Iraq is also very little, very late. Why did Obama wait seven months after the IS takeover of Fallujah and nine weeks after the capture of Mosul before [beginning supplying the Kurds](#) with desperately needed weapons?

And why just small arms supplied supposedly clandestinely through the CIA? The Kurds are totally outgunned. Their bullets are bouncing off the captured armored Humvees the IS has deployed against them. The Pentagon should be conducting a massive airlift to provide the pesh merga with armored vehicles, anti-tank missiles and other heavier weaponry.

And why the pinprick airstrikes? The IS-Kurdish front is 600 miles long, more than the distance between Boston and Washington. [The Pentagon admits](#) that the current tactics — hitting an artillery piece here, a truck there — will not affect the momentum of the IS or the course of the war.

But then again, altering the course of a war would be a strategic objective. That seems not to be in Obama's portfolio.

## SteynOnLine

### My New Best Friends

by Mark Steyn

As you may have heard, Big Climate consensus-enforcer and fake Nobel Laureate Michael E Mann is suing me and a trio of co-defendants for [disparaging his hockey stick](#). On Monday, as I mentioned [the other day](#), various bodies from the ACLU to the Cato Institute filed a flurry of briefs with the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. That in turn has prompted a slew of news stories on the case, the general gist of which you can get from the headlines:

[Media and rights organizations defend National Review, et al. against Michael Mann](#) (*The Washington Post*)

[Climate scientist faces broad array of foes in suit vs. National Review](#) (*Reuters*)

[Groups rally around think tank, publication being sued for global warming views](#) (*Fox News*)

...and of course:

[Hopefully Dr. Michael E. Mann Doesn't Sue Me For This Column](#) (*Forbes*)

By contrast, the response from Doctor Fraudpants' dwindling band of ecophants has been somewhat muted. Mann diehard Oakden Wolf objected to that headline about "groups" rallying around and [rewrote it](#):

*There should be modifications of "Groups", i.e., "Conservative, climate skeptical, oil-friendly groups rally..."*

Yes, indeed. It's just Koch-funded notorious right-wing denialist groups like the ACLU, *The Washington Post*, NBC News, and *The Los Angeles Times* coming out against Dr Mann. Nothing for you chaps in the Big Climate bubble to worry about.

Steve McIntyre summarized it [this way](#):

*I get the sense that the Washington libel community and U.S. national media have belatedly woken up to the potential threat of Mann v Steyn and that the tide is now starting to run strongly against Mann in the anti-SLAPP proceedings. The most visible evidence of this is an impressive Amici [brief](#) from the ACLU and an imposing list of 25 other media organizations.*

Steve may be right. Six years ago, in my battles with Canada's "human rights" commissions, it was initially just me, Ezra Levant, *Maclean's*, and a handful of notorious fringe crazies. As I said to my boss at *Maclean's*, Ken Whyte, we could hold the big free-speech rally in the back of his Honda Civic. But the months went by, and eventually PEN Canada, the Canadian Committee for World Press Freedom, *The Globe & Mail*, *The Toronto Star* and the rest of the gang all got on board, leaving the Canadian Islamic Congress with no-one but Bernie Farber and a handful of other kinky state-censorship fetishists.

It's premature to say the same process is underway here. But let us note the difference a year makes. Last autumn, when this matter first came before the DC Court of Appeals (I could explain why, but it makes my eyeballs bleed - instead, see page six of [my own brief](#)), the same media bigfeet jumped in. I wrote about it in a post headlined "[My New Friends](#)" - a somewhat sardonic title, given that the friendship of *The Washington Post*, NBC et al was very narrowly confined. They were supporting us

*...only in our right to appeal the Superior Court's rejection of our motion to dismiss under the D.C. SLAPP statute.*

Well, here we are nine months later, and the media grandees have gotten a little cozier with me. Some of Steve McIntyre's [commentators](#) think that the ACLU/Big Media support is still only on the narrow procedural issue of immediate appealability, but that's not so. More than half the brief is a principled free-speech defense of what I and Rand Simberg said - or as the contents page puts it:

***II) THE CHALLENGED STATEMENTS ARE PROTECTED EXPRESSIONS OF OPINION ON AN IMPORTANT SCIENTIFIC AND PUBLIC POLICY DEBATE***

So they've gone from being "my new friends" to "my new best friends". They don't really like me all that much, of course - anymore than *The Globe & Mail* or PEN Canada did in 2008. There's no danger of me being offered a gig at *The Washington Post* or *Time* or *The Chicago Tribune* any time soon. Nor does it mean they agree with me on the substance. *The Los Angeles Times*, for example, refuses to print on its letters page any correspondence from so-called "climate deniers".

But that's the point: Their refusal to print dissenting opinion is *their* choice, not Michael Mann's - and they want it to stay that way. Furthermore, were this weird insecure bully to succeed in shrinking the First Amendment to his own particular needs, the consequences would not be confined to "climate change" (on which they happen to agree with him) but would extend to every other aspect of public discourse. The ACLU & Co are very vigorous in where a victory for Mann would lead:

*The language of the commentaries similarly confirms that they are opinions. They describe Mann variously as "unscientific" and "the ringmaster of a tree-ring circus" and compare him metaphorically to both Jerry Sandusky and Bernie Madoff. And they criticize the official reviews of his methods, using terms like "scandal," "whitewash," "cover up," and "Climategate"... That the court below [the appalling and incompetent judge Natalia Combs Greene] found unprotected opinions expressed in such a context and using such obviously opinion-based language is particularly concerning to amici, which regularly include opinions within their publications, broadcasts, and websites.*

They also reject the simpleton notion advanced by Mann's groupies - that merely wrapping oneself in the mantle of "science" should insulate someone from criticism:

*As Mann himself concedes, the commentaries did not accuse him of fabricating data from thin air but instead were harshly critical of his scientific models, methods, and conclusions... Amici respectfully submit that permitting such a defamation claim to proceed will substantially chill speech that challenges scientific conclusions, as well as public policies based on them. In holding otherwise, the court below failed to appreciate that hyperbolic criticisms are a legitimate part of the "rough and tumble" nature of heated debate on important issues of public concern.*

And they are utterly contemptuous of the core of Mann's defense - that because a government bureaucrat somewhere or other has given his wretched "science" a clean bill of health, that ends all debate:

*Furthermore, to the extent the Superior Court credited Mann's assertion that investigations by the EPA, the National Science Foundation, and Penn State, among other scientific and governmental bodies, "laid to rest" defendants' questions regarding Mann's research, Am. Compl. ¶ 24, this too was in error. See also July 19, 2013 Orders at 16 (suggesting that statements were actionable because "Plaintiff's work has been investigated and substantiated on numerous occasions"). The fact that certain official panels backed Mann's methodology – facts that were not only disclosed in the challenged publications but in fact formed the basis for them – cannot allow him to silence his critics in a defamation claim. Under the First Amendment, the government is not the final arbiter of truth with the power to foreclose further challenge to its policies.*

"To the extent the Superior Court credited Mann's assertion" is a very discreet way of putting Mann's flimflam, but there's an important truth therein: Whether or not government bodies support Mann is irrelevant. In, say, Ferguson, Missouri, a police bureaucrat might well stand up and say, "We've looked into the fatal shooting of this kid, and everything was done by the book." That does not mean the citizenry do not have the right to dispute the official conclusion. Likewise, a Treasury internal investigation might say, oh, the IRS did nothing wrong in going after Tea Party groups. That doesn't mean we all have to shut up and accept it. Mann is demanding something that no free society can give him.

One of Steve McIntyre's commenters makes a sharp point on [the multiple falsehoods in Mann's court pleadings](#):

*As a retired judge I find it extremely puzzling that Mann's lawyers, who are apparently very well paid and presumably competent, would have allowed allegations to be included in the complaint and other filings, such as the obviously and demonstrably false statements regarding the various inquiry approvals of his work. It smacks of poor preparation and, perhaps, of being dominated by a forceful client. If I were hearing this matter, I would not like at all the fact that obvious misrepresentations had been made to the court in the sworn pleadings.*

To which Steve replies:

*It's hard to believe that independent lawyers wouldn't be embarrassed by such falsehoods. However, I think that one of Mann's lawyers has gone with him on a couple of occasions to the AGU convention to preach to climate scientists. That suggests that the lawyer is also infused with the "Cause" and that one should not assume that the errors and misrepresentations are entirely the fault of a forceful client. Because their pleadings include language more or less copied from SKS (including the list of supposed exonerations), I wonder whether the lawyers performed any relevant due diligence (e.g. reading the inquiry reports) and, if so, how they could have incorrectly characterized the reports in more or less the same way as SKS.*

I can't claim to know what's inside Mann's overheated head. Perhaps he genuinely believes he's a Nobel Laureate who's been exonerated by Sir Muir Russell and Lord Oxburgh and NOAA and the British Government and everybody else. But his lawyers - even the ideologues, like Peter Fontaine - can't plead self-delusion. As officers of the court, they're obliged to do what Steve calls "due diligence". Mann has played fast and loose with the facts all his adult life. If I were his counsel, I would be double-checking everything he tells me.

Given the procedural bollocks the disgraceful Judge Combs Greene made of this case, my preference since December has been to go to trial as soon as possible. I've responded to Mann's discovery requests on me, and I'd like him to reciprocate and undergo deposition. I think it would be better, both for my own case and the law in general, for him to lose at trial, and I'd like to get there sooner rather than later. All that said, I am modestly heartened by how this case is going, and by the way Mann's behavior is being seen for what it is. I would especially like to thank SteynOnline readers from around the world who've supported this pushback against a vexatious litigant and prodigious liar by buying my [books](#), [gift certificates](#), exclusive [trial merchandise](#), and even my [Christmas disco CD](#) over at the [Steyn store](#). You kept us in the game at a very difficult time when the conventional wisdom was that Mann was [cruising to victory](#), and you enabled me to hire [a first-rate free-speech legal team](#) that, like me, is itching to get on with deposition and discovery.

He might still win, of course. Given the ghastly misapplication of the law by Judge Combs Greene, one would be foolish to rule out any possibility in this so-called justice system. My plan in such an eventuality was to put a false beard over my real beard, flee jurisdiction, and undergo reconstructive surgery somewhere where they do a nice job, like Switzerland. However, as I said to Hugh Hewitt on the radio today, it's clear that what's changed is that the major media and human-rights groups now recognize that Mann's suit is a serious threat to *their* freedom. As the ACLU/Big Media brief puts it:

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So, even if he did win in DC court, we'd be pushing on, if necessary all the way to the Supreme Court. And in the end he will lose, and lose big - because the alternative would be the worst setback for the First Amendment in half-a-century.

## National Review

### [Meet the New Squeegee Men](#)

***Bill de Blasio's New York is coming unwound.***

by Kevin D. Williamson

The Squeegee Man was the personification of old, dysfunctional, pre-Giuliani New York City. These guys were extortion artists, who would "help" motorists stuck in clogged automotive arteries, such as those leading to the Lincoln Tunnel, by forcing their unsolicited windshield-cleaning services on them and then demanding payment, the demand generally being accompanied by verbal abuse or the threat of violence — and, occasionally, with actual violence. Squeegee Man symbolized the disorder and lawlessness of New York life — not a murderer or a rapist, just one of the many lower-level hassles and terrors that made the city so unbearable back in what some insist on remembering as the good ol' days of crack addicts and hookers on Times Square.

Squeegee Man is making a comeback, both in his traditional form — [as documented by the New York Post](#) — and in a new, mutant form: Sunday Hijacker. Sunday Hijacker is cleverer and more cynical than his predecessor, and his modus operandi is to make a scene inside a church

during worship until somebody pays him to go away. Screaming, knocking over furnishings, and threatening violence are his shtick.

On Sunday, I was at Mass at a congregation with whom I sometimes worship (Catholic liturgy on Park Avenue — that's a National Review Sunday, missing only the tying of a soft-shackle Edwards), and was intrigued by one of the announcements at the end of the service: Parishioners were asked to call 9-1-1 if they were threatened inside the church or on the church grounds by people demanding money. We were implored to make a donation to one of the many Catholic charities caring for the homeless instead of complying with vagrants' demands for cash. The police, parishioners were assured, had been contacted, and they had promised to pay extra attention to the church.

I had a pretty good idea what they were talking about: A few minutes before Mass began, a very angry and incoherent man had been raging through the church, shouting various obscenities and generally making an urban spectacle of himself. The ushers, exhibiting the telltale signs of resignation, gently showed him out, inquiring as to whether he'd care to spend the remainder of the day with the police. Said inquiry was met with a negative, and a not especially polite one.

On Monday, I spoke with a church employee about the situation — and, as we spoke, the same guy was in the church, making the same spectacle, threatening elderly people, particularly women. "He's here every single day," she said. "It's dangerous. We talked to the police. They took him to Bellevue," a nearby hospital with a psychiatric ward. "He was released, and back here the next day. We don't know what else to do." Because the church is a place that is open to the public, she said, it probably will be obliged to get a restraining order — dealing with Sunday Hijackers on a case-by-case basis.

Detective Frank Bogucki, the community-affairs officer for the 17th Precinct, said that my inquiry was the first he had heard of the matter. "It's not common, but it happens sometimes," he said. "It's happened in other parishes." NYPD headquarters did not respond to a request for comment.

This is not unique to New York City. In Philadelphia, which still is awaiting its Rudy Giuliani, aggressive panhandling, some of it nearly indistinguishable from mugging, was common both inside churches and on their grounds during my time there. This was especially true on holidays. The Easter Vigil Mass and, especially, the Christmas Eve Mass at the downtown cathedral were absolute freak shows when the congregation was dismissed.

There is, as noted above, a very strong element of cynicism at work here. Panhandlers are rational economic actors, and they know that the institutions least likely to evict them are churches. They also know that people at church or coming from Sunday worship are probably more psychologically inclined to endure such abuse as they choose to proffer. Christians believe that we have a special mission to the poor, and it feels unseemly to kick poor people out of the church — even when we know that they are there not for worship but for extortion.

But the fact is that there is practically no legitimate reason to be engaged in street-level begging in New York City, which has splendidly provided for services, public and private, to feed and shelter those who need it. The people who sleep on the streets in New York are mostly addicts and mentally ill people, the neglect of whom is a national scandal, and those who refuse, for whatever reason, to avail themselves of such services as are available. It is difficult for Christians and other charitably minded people to accept, but there are poor people who are bad people, and who are willing to use threats and violence to get their way.

The Sunday Hijacker is emblematic of a city reverting to chaos. He is not the only emblem. My own experience attests that places such as the 33rd Street subway station, the City Hall station, and Penn Station have become noticeably more disorderly over the course of the past year — more vagrancy, more filth, more people using them as camp sites. Shootings are up across the city.

And Squeegee Man is back on the job, just down the street from National Review's offices, as it turns out. And Mayor Bill de Blasio? His main interest in office so far is trying to kill the city's charter schools. His attention to police matters at the moment is dominated by an insurgency on his left in the wake of a homicide involving a police officer using a chokehold against NYPD regulations. Lucky for New York, the Reverend Al Sharpton is on the scene, in case anybody needs a riot incited.

The more things change, the more I shop for real estate in Taos.

**WSJ**

### **Low-Salt Diets May Pose Health Risks, Study Finds**

***Findings Are Latest Challenge to Benefits of Aggressively Low Sodium Targets***

by Ron Winslow

A long-running debate over the merits of eating less salt escalated Wednesday when one of the most comprehensive studies yet suggested cutting back on sodium too much actually poses health hazards.

Current guidelines from U.S. government agencies, the World Health Organization, the American Heart Association and other groups set daily dietary sodium targets between 1,500 and 2,300 milligrams or lower, well below the average U.S. daily consumption of about 3,400 milligrams.

The new study, which tracked more than 100,000 people from 17 countries over an average of more than three years, found that those who consumed fewer than 3,000 milligrams of sodium a day had a 27% higher risk of death or a serious event such as a heart attack or stroke in that period than those whose intake was estimated at 3,000 to 6,000 milligrams. Risk of death or other major events increased with intake above 6,000 milligrams.

The findings, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, are the latest to challenge the benefit of aggressively low sodium targets—especially for generally healthy people. Last year, [a report from the Institute of Medicine](#), which advises Congress on health issues, didn't find evidence that cutting sodium intake below 2,300 milligrams reduced risk of cardiovascular disease.

The new report has shortcomings, and as an observational study it found only an association, not a causative effect, between very low sodium and cardiovascular risk. Still, it spurred calls to reconsider the targets. This "adds a pretty big weight on the side that low salt intake is associated with harm," said Suzanne Oparil, professor of medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and an expert on high blood pressure. Without evidence from randomized trials to back them up, the low-sodium targets are "questionable health policy," she said. Dr. Oparil was author of an editorial that accompanied the findings.

"It's about time that major groups who are making recommendations on sodium take a more measured approach," said Salim Yusuf of the Population Health Research Institute, or PHRI, at McMaster's University in Ontario and senior author of two papers on the new study.

The American Heart Association, a strong proponent of the low-sodium targets, isn't persuaded. Certain methods in the study, including how dietary sodium was estimated from urine samples, call "into question our ability to have confidence" in the findings, said Elliott Antman, AHA president.

"We hold fast to the recommendations that there is a need to reduce sodium intake in the diet," said Dr. Antman, a cardiologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

The Food and Drug Administration said it intends to review the studies. The agency said it "continues to recognize [the need to reduce the sodium content](#) of the food supply" to help reduce sodium intake.

Participants in the study, known as the Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiology study, or Pure, consumed an average of 4,930 milligrams of sodium a day, based on estimates derived from a single urine sample obtained when they enrolled in the study. The research was funded through a variety of public, private and corporate sources, according to PHRI.

Researchers followed participants for an average of 3.7 years. They found that 4.3% of those who consumed less than 3,000 milligrams of sodium either died or suffered a heart attack or stroke or developed heart failure in that time, versus 3.1% with intake between 3,000 and 6,000 milligrams. The percentage rose to 3.2% at levels above 6,000 milligrams and to 3.3% above 7,000 milligrams.

## Moving Target

A new study takes aim at daily sodium recommendations, which are much lower than the intake of average Americans.

Daily dietary sodium guidelines, in milligrams

American Heart Association **Less than 1,500**

World Health Organization **Less than 2,000**

U.S. Food and Drug Administration **Less than 2,300**

U.S. average daily sodium intake\* **3,400**

More than 40% of the sodium consumed by Americans comes from the following 10 types of foods:

- Breads and rolls
- Cold cuts and cured meats
- Pizza
- Fresh and processed poultry
- Soups
- Sandwiches
- Cheese
- Mixed pasta dishes
- Mixed meat dishes
- Salty snacks

\*Ages 2 years and older

Sources: U.S. Food and Drug Administration; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Wall Street Journal

Sodium, the main component of salt, is a nutrient that is key to many cellular functions, many of which would likely "function on a lower level" with low sodium levels, said Niels Graudal, an internal-medicine specialist at Copenhagen University Hospital in Denmark who wasn't involved in this study. Too little sodium could trigger a hormonal response from the renin-angiotensin system that regulates blood pressure and actually increase blood pressure, researchers said. Very low sodium is also associated with higher blood fats called lipids, another risk for cardiovascular disease, Dr. Graudal said.

Little is known about what the right sodium levels are, but high levels are associated with high blood pressure, also known as hypertension—a key risk factor for heart attacks, strokes and heart failure. Estimates are that more than one billion adults world-wide have hypertension.

Current guidelines are largely derived from short-term studies that found that low-salt diets helped people already diagnosed with hypertension or with borderline high blood pressure to get their readings significantly lower.

But studies that show the resulting blood-pressure reduction in such patients reduces risk of death or serious cardiovascular problems are lacking.

"There is not a single study, not one, showing [such a] benefit for having a sodium intake of less than 2,300 milligrams," said Brian Strom, chancellor of Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences in New Jersey who wasn't involved in the study but chaired the Institute of Medicine panel that reported on sodium last year.

Dr. Antman of the AHA said conducting a long-term randomized trial to prove such a benefit would be "very challenging."

Absent that, the heart association believes other research, including a recent British study associating a reduction of salt intake in the population during the past decade with a lower rate of death from stroke and heart disease, support aggressive dietary sodium targets.

Underscoring the divide among heart experts over sodium intake levels, a separate study Wednesday in NEJM, from researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health, estimated that globally, there were 1.65 million deaths from cardiovascular causes in 2010 attributed to sodium consumption above 2,000 milligrams a day. The findings were derived from a complex calculation of results from 107 randomized studies and other data.

Dr. Antman said the result offered "a sense of the staggering numbers of people who are dying" from excess dietary sodium. Dr. Oparil, who is a past president of the heart association, termed researchers' efforts "herculean," but said because of the "lack of high-quality data" and "numerous assumptions" that went into the analysis, "caution should be taken in interpreting the findings."

Dr. Antman also said that the effect of a high-sodium diet accumulates over many years, leading to elevated blood pressure and a stiffening of blood vessels that results in increased risk for heart disease and strokes.

Reducing dietary sodium has been a public-health goal for several decades, but meeting the recommended targets is a daunting challenge for most people. Fewer than 1% of Americans are now in compliance, Dr. Strom said. More than three-quarters of dietary sodium comes not from

the salt shaker but from processed food and restaurant fare, according to the FDA. Grocery-store aisles and restaurants, according to information on a Texas A&M University website, are rich in sodium: 264 milligrams in two slices of whole-wheat bread; 1,107 in a cup of chicken noodle soup; 639 in a hot dog; 1,093 in a frozen pot pie; 709 in a fast-food cheeseburger.

Such levels help explain calls for efforts to work with food makers to reduce sodium content. "Very high levels of sodium intake appear to be associated with bad outcomes," said Michael Lauer, director of cardiovascular sciences at the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. "That's an important message to keep in mind."







