June 1, 2015

Pickerhead's Iron Rule of Government is that it always screws up. Knowing that, would it surprise that the water crisis in the West is partially caused by federal policies? **Scientific American** has the story which starts in Coolidge AZ located almost halfway between Phoenix and Tuscon. We cut this long piece short but supplied links without firewalls if you want to read more.

State Route 87, the thin band of pavement that approaches the mostly shuttered town of Coolidge, Ariz., cuts through some of the least hospitable land in the country. The valley of red and brown sand is interrupted occasionally by rock and saguaro cactus. It's not unusual for summer temperatures to top 116 degrees. And there is almost no water; this part of Arizona receives less than nine inches of rainfall each year.

Then Route 87 tacks left and the dead landscape springs to life. Barren roadside is replaced by thousands of acres of cotton fields, their bright, leafy green stalks and white, puffy bolls in neat rows that unravel for miles. It's a vision of bounty where it would be least expected. Step into the hip-high cotton shrubs, with the soft, water-soaked dirt giving way beneath your boot soles, the bees buzzing in your ears, the pungent odor of the plants in your nostrils, and you might as well be in Georgia.

Getting plants to grow in the Sonoran Desert is made possible by importing billions of gallons of water each year. Cotton is one of the thirstiest crops in existence, and each acre cultivated here demands six times as much water as lettuce, 60 percent more than wheat. That precious liquid is pulled from a nearby federal reservoir, siphoned from beleaguered underground aquifers and pumped in from the Colorado River hundreds of miles away. ...

... The water shortages that have brought California, Arizona and other Western states to the edge of an environmental cliff have been attributed to a historic climate event—a dry spell that experts worry could be the worst in 1,000 years. But an examination by ProPublica shows that the scarcity of water is as much a man-made crisis as a natural one, the result of decades of missteps and misapprehensions by governments and businesses as they have faced surging demand driven by a booming population.

The federal subsidies that prop up cotton farming in Arizona are just one of myriad ways that policymakers have refused, or been slow to reshape laws to reflect the West's changing circumstances. ...

Since a new earthquake movie (San Andreas) is out, it's a good time for **Smithsonian Magazine** to write about what the next big CA quake will be like.

A giant earthquake will strike California this summer. Skyscrapers will topple, the Hoover Dam will crumble and a massive tsunami will wash across the Golden Gate Bridge. Or at least, that's the scenario that will play out on the big screen in San Andreas.

The moviemakers consulted Thomas Jordan, director of the Southern California Earthquake Center, before they started filming, but "they probably didn't take much of my advice," he says. While the actual threats from the Big One are pretty terrifying, they are nowhere near the devastation witnessed by Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and his onscreen companions. Even the largest of San Andreas' quakes can't produce a massive tsunami like the one that swells over

San Francisco in the movie. "The really big tsunamis, like the one that hit Japan, are caused by earthquakes that generate a major displacement of the ocean floor," Jordan says. The San Andreas fault sits far inland, and the land slips past on either side. For that reason, a quake also can't cause the fault to split apart into a giant chasm as it does in the film. And despite the warnings of distraught movie scientists, even the largest of California's quakes won't be felt by anything but seismometers on the East Coast.

That doesn't mean California is off the hook, though. While the movie may be more fantasy than reality, the Big One is coming, and it will produce plenty of destruction. "We think Southern California is locked and loaded, that the stresses have really built up, and when things start unleashing, they could unleash for years," says U.S. Geological Survey seismologist Ned Field. ...

Salt again! **Peter Whoriskey** in WaPo posts on new research.
For years, health authorities around the world have warned people that they are eating too much salt.

This salty binge is causing heart attacks and strokes, according to these warnings, and in the U.S. alone, authorities say too much salt is precipitating tens of thousands of deaths annually.

Yet the response to these warnings has been a remarkable show of dietary disobedience. An estimated 95 percent of the world's population keep eating salt in amounts officials deem excessive.

So who's right - the people, or the health authorities? The question sounds naive, but in fact, some scientists ask the very same thing, and it lurks behind the debate that has sprung up this year over the government's longstanding salt advice, which is embedded in the U.S. Dietary Guidelines.

At a major scientific conference last week in New York City, some presenters suggested that, in fact, the persistent global appetite for salt might be a sign that humans are geared for more salt than health authorities would allow.

These scientists point to new science indicating humans may be hard-wired to crave salt, and that there may be a natural appetite for it above the amounts that the government recommends. They point to the vast gap between what the authorities say is a healthy amount of salt and the amounts that people around the world are actually consuming. ...

Turns out the best review of the new Wright Bros. book was in **National Review.** Best because it highlight's McCullough's delight in recounting government's failures and the myopic national media.
... The story of the Wright Brothers was also a story about the efficacy of "government investment." It turns out that the head of the Smithsonian Institution, Samuel Langley, who himself was himself an inventor and a renowned scientist, put a team of the best and the brightest minds together to launch a manned-flight project, and put some serious government money behind the project.

Only it didn't pan out. The project, which cost some $70,000 — a large sum at the time — was a complete disaster, McCullough explained. "The Langley project unfortunately deterred the government from taking a serious interest in the Wrights because they really wasted so much money on something that didn't work at all," McCullough explained.

"'We didn't suppose the aeroplane could ever be practical outside the realm of sport,' Orville Wright said. 'It was the sport of the thing that appealed to Will and me.'"

Not that the Wright brothers would have taken the help. They thought that outside investment — from either the public sector or the private sector — would mean that they had relinquished control of their day-to-day work and decision-making. So they used their own money, and used it judiciously, rather than answer to any outsiders.

If you think the scientific elites fared poorly in this story, you'll love the way the media elites came off. It turns out that, believing that a couple of bike-shop owners could not possibly do what they'd claimed to have done, never bothered to check out their story. But Amos Root, a writer with an interest in scientific pursuits, a guy who made a small fortune making beekeepers' equipment, went down to Dayton to see things for himself. McCullough explained what happened next.

"He wrote a superb article describing the flight that he saw. It wasn't only very descriptive. It was very accurate, and of considerable length. The first full accurate, fair reporting of this phenomenon that changed history was written by a beekeeper, published in his little newspaper."

That's right. It took a beekeeper to break the biggest science story of the year. But there's more:

"Root then sent his story to Scientific American, saying, You're free to publish this at no charge, and they just dismissed it as the writings of some whacko out in Ohio. The arrogance, the superiority of those who were in the know, again and again, in the government, in journalism, was almost comical."

Our government elites weren't much interested in the story, either. McCullough described the situation: ...

Since he moved to the NY Times and went native, **David Brooks** has rarely been in Pickings. His last is worth our attention. The title is "The Small, Happy Life."

A few weeks ago, I asked readers to send in essays describing their purpose in life and how they found it. A few thousand submitted contributions, and many essays are online. I'll write more about the lessons they shared in the weeks ahead, but one common theme surprised me.

I expected most contributors would follow the commencement-speech clichés of our high-achieving culture: dream big; set ambitious goals; try to change the world. In fact, a surprising number of people found their purpose by going the other way, by pursuing the small, happy life.

Elizabeth Young once heard the story of a man who was asked by a journalist to show his most precious possession. The man, Young wrote, "was proud and excited to show the journalist the gift he had been bequeathed. A banged up tin pot he kept carefully wrapped in cloth as though it

was fragile. The journalist was confused, what made this dingy old pot so valuable? 'The message,' the friend replied. The message was 'we do not all have to shine.' This story resonated deeply. In that moment I was able to relieve myself of the need to do something important, from which I would reap praise and be rewarded with fulfillment. My vision cleared."

Young continues, "I have always wanted to be effortlessly kind. I wanted to raise children who were kind." She notes that among those who survived the Nazi death camps, a predominant quality she noticed was generosity.

"Perhaps," she concludes, "the mission is not a mission at all. ... Everywhere there are tiny, seemingly inconsequential circumstances that, if explored, provide meaning" and chances to be generous and kind. Spiritual and emotional growth happens in microscopic increments. ...

One person who didn't sign on to a small life was a fisherman in Florida who landed a 550 pound grouper from a kayak. **Daily News** with the story.
Next time he should bring a bigger boat.

A Florida man made a once in a lifetime catch when he reeled in a 552-pound grouper fish May 20 while sitting on a kayak in Sanibel, Fla.

Scientific American

Federal Dollars Are Financing the Water Crisis in the West

ProPublica examination shows that the scarcity of water is as much a man-made crisis as a natural one

by Abrahm Lustgarten, Naveena Sadasivam

State Route 87, the thin band of pavement that approaches the mostly shuttered town of Coolidge, Ariz., cuts through some of the least hospitable land in the country. The valley of red and brown sand is interrupted occasionally by rock and saguaro cactus. It's not unusual for summer temperatures to top 116 degrees. And there is almost no water; this part of Arizona receives less than nine inches of rainfall each year.

Then Route 87 tacks left and the dead landscape springs to life. Barren roadside is replaced by thousands of acres of cotton fields, their bright, leafy green stalks and white, puffy bolls in neat rows that unravel for miles. It's a vision of bounty where it would be least expected. Step into the hip-high cotton shrubs, with the soft, water-soaked dirt giving way beneath your boot soles, the bees buzzing in your ears, the pungent odor of the plants in your nostrils, and you might as well be in Georgia.

Getting plants to grow in the Sonoran Desert is made possible by importing billions of gallons of water each year. Cotton is one of the thirstiest crops in existence, and each acre cultivated here demands six times as much water as lettuce, 60 percent more than wheat. That precious liquid is pulled from a nearby federal reservoir, siphoned from beleaguered underground aquifers and pumped in from the Colorado River hundreds of miles away. Greg Wuertz has been farming cotton on these fields since 1981, and before him, his father and grandfather did the same. His family is part of Arizona's agricultural royalty. His father was a board member of the Central Arizona Water Conservation District for nearly two decades. Wuertz has served as president of several of the most important cotton organizations in the state.

But what was once a breathtaking accomplishment—raising cotton in a desert—has become something that Wuertz pursues with a twinge of doubt chipping at his conscience. Demand and prices for cotton have plummeted, and he knows no one really needs what he supplies. More importantly, he understands that cotton comes at enormous environmental expense, a price the American West may no longer be able to afford.

Wuertz could plant any number of crops that use far less water than cotton and fill grocery store shelves from Maine to Minnesota. But along with hundreds of farmers across Arizona, he has kept planting his fields with cotton instead. He says he has done it out of habit, pride, practicality, and even a self-deprecating sense that he wouldn't be good at anything else. But in truth, one reason outweighs all the others: The federal government has long offered him so many financial incentives to do it that he can't afford not to.

"Some years all of what you made came from the government," Wuertz said. "Your bank would finance your farming operation … because they knew the support was guaranteed. They wouldn't finance wheat, or alfalfa. Cotton was always dependable, it would always work."

The water shortages that have brought California, Arizona and other Western states to the edge of an environmental cliff have been attributed to a historic climate event—a dry spell that experts worry could be the worst in 1,000 years. But an examination by ProPublica shows that the scarcity of water is as much a man-made crisis as a natural one, the result of decades of missteps and misapprehensions by governments and businesses as they have faced surging demand driven by a booming population.

The federal subsidies that prop up cotton farming in Arizona are just one of myriad ways that policymakers have refused, or been slow to reshape laws to reflect the West's changing circumstances. Provisions in early–20th-century water-use laws that not only permit but also compel farmers and others to use more water than they need are another. "Use It or Lose It" is the cynical catch phrase for one of those policies.

Western leaders also have flinched repeatedly when staring down the insatiable, unstoppable force of urban sprawl. Las Vegas authorities have spent billions of dollars inventing new ways to bring water to their ever-expanding city, yet could not cite a single development permit they had ever denied because of concerns about water.

Instead, when faced with a dwindling water supply, state and federal officials have again and again relied on human ingenuity to engineer a way out of making hard choices about using less water. But the engineering that made settling the West possible may have reached the bounds of its potential. Dams and their reservoirs leak or lose billions of gallons of water to evaporation. The colossal Navajo Generating Station, which burns 22,000 tons of coal a day in large part to push water hundreds of miles across Arizona, is among the nation's biggest greenhouse gas polluters, contributing to the very climate change that is exacerbating the drought.

Few crises have been more emphatically and presciently predicted. Almost 150 years ago, John Wesley Powell, the geologist and explorer, traveled the Colorado River in an effort to gauge America's chances for developing its arid western half. His report to Congress reached a chastening conclusion: There wasn't enough water to support significant settlement.

For more than a century, Americans have defied Powell's words, constructing 20 of the nation's largest cities and a vibrant economy that, among other bounties, provides an astonishing proportion of the country's fruit and vegetables.

For almost as long, the policies that shaped the West have struggled to match the region's ambitions—endless growth, new industry, fertile farming and plentiful power—to its water supply.

Today, as the Colorado River enters its 15th year of drought, the nation's largest reservoirs have been diminished to relative puddles. Power plants that depend on dams along the river face shortages and shutdowns that could send water and electricity prices skyrocketing. Many of the region's farmers have been forced to fallow fields.

The still-blooming cotton farms of Arizona are emblematic of the reluctance to make choices that seem obvious. The Wuertz family has received government checks just for putting cottonseeds in the ground and more checks when the price of cotton fell. They have benefited from cheap loans for cotton production that don't have to be fully repaid if the market slumps. Most recently, the government has covered almost the entire premium on their cotton crop insurance, guaranteeing they'll be financially protected even when natural conditions—like drought—keep them from producing a good harvest.

The payments, part of the U.S. Farm Bill, are a legacy of Dust Bowl-era programs that live on today at the urging of the national cotton lobby and the insurance industry. Similar subsidies support corn, rice, wheat and, indirectly, alfalfa—all of which also use lots of water. But in Arizona one of the driest states in the nation, it's cotton that has received the most federal aid, tipping the balance on farmers' decisions about what to plant.

Over the last 20 years, Arizona's farmers have collected more than $1.1 billion in cotton subsidies, nine times more than the amount paid out for the next highest subsidized crop. In California, where cotton also gets more support than most other crops, farmers received more than $3 billion in cotton aid. ...

Read more here; http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/federal-dollars-are-financing-the-water-crisis-in-the-west/ *This article has another 4,000 words. Too long to include it all in*

Pickings. There's enough here to get the drift - the government always screws up. When we see something going wrong, the correct fix is to locate and repeal the bad law.

Smithsonian Magazine

What Will Really Happen When San Andreas Unleashes the Big One?

A major earthquake will cause plenty of destruction along the West Coast, but it won't look like it does in the movies.

by Sarah Zielinski

A giant earthquake will strike California this summer. Skyscrapers will topple, the Hoover Dam will crumble and a massive tsunami will wash across the Golden Gate Bridge. Or at least, that's the scenario that will play out on the big screen in *San Andreas*.

The moviemakers consulted Thomas Jordan, director of the Southern California Earthquake Center, before they started filming, but "they probably didn't take much of my advice," he says. While the actual threats from the Big One are pretty terrifying, they are nowhere near the devastation witnessed by Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and his onscreen companions. Even the largest of San Andreas' quakes can't produce a massive tsunami like the one that swells over San Francisco in the movie. "The really big tsunamis, like the one that hit Japan, are caused by earthquakes that generate a major displacement of the ocean floor," Jordan says. The San Andreas fault sits far inland, and the land slips past on either side. For that reason, a quake also can't cause the fault to split apart into a giant chasm as it does in the film. And despite the warnings of distraught movie scientists, even the largest of California's quakes won't be felt by anything but seismometers on the East Coast.

That doesn't mean California is off the hook, though. While the movie may be more fantasy than reality, the Big One is coming, and it will produce plenty of destruction. "We think Southern California is locked and loaded, that the stresses have really built up, and when things start unleashing, they could unleash for years," says U.S. Geological Survey seismologist Ned Field.

California sits at the border between two major tectonic plates—the Pacific plate, which is moving northwest, and the North American plate, which is sliding past it to the southeast. The two plates don't just meet at a single line, and the state is crisscrossed with dozens of earthquake faults. The San Andreas is the most worrisome, because it generates the quakes that are really dangerous to California residents, Jordan notes.

The northern San Andreas leveled San Francisco in 1906, but it's been a lot longer since the southern part of the fault ruptured. On average, Southern California has seen big quakes every 110 to 140 years, based on records of past earthquakes and studies of earthquake faults. The last big quake near Los Angeles, a magnitude 7.9, struck Fort Tejon in 1857. Farther south, near Palm Springs, the fault hasn't ruptured in over 300 years. "Eventually the fault will have to break," Jordan says.

While seismologists can't predict exactly when that will happen, every few years they release a forecast for the likelihood of such an event. The latest forecast, published earlier this year by the USGS, estimates a 7 percent chance that a magnitude 8 quake will occur in California within the next 30 years. That's about as big as earthquakes can get in California, notes Jordan—a

magnitude 8.3 quake might be possible if the entire San Andreas fault were to rupture from the Mexico border up to northern California. “We don’t think that’s likely,” he says.

To figure out what could realistically happen when the Big One finally strikes, a team of earthquake experts sat down sat down several years ago and created the ShakeOut scenario. Seismologists modeled how the ground would shake and then other experts, including engineers and social scientists, used that information to estimate the resulting damage and impacts. The detailed report examines the effects of a hypothetical 7.8 quake that strikes the Coachella Valley at 10 a.m. on November 13, 2008. In the following minutes, the earthquake waves travel across California, leveling older buildings, disrupting roads and severing electric, telephone and water lines.

But the quake is only the beginning.

Hundreds of fires start, and with roads blocked and the water system damaged, emergency personnel aren’t be able to put them all out. Smaller fires merge into larger ones, taking out whole sections of Los Angeles. The lines that bring water, electricity and gas to Los Angeles all cross the San Andreas fault—they break during the quake and won’t be fixed for months. Though most modern buildings survive the shaking, many are rendered structurally unusable. Aftershocks shake the state in the following days, continuing the destruction.

The scenario is actually somewhat of an underestimate, notes one scientist behind the ShakeOut, USGS seismologist Lucy Jones. The report’s team was surprised by the extent of the fire damage from the quake, Jones says, but it could be worse if the Santa Ana winds are blowing when the event happens. These seasonal winds blow dusty, dry air from inland toward the coast, increasing risks of wildfires. And while Los Angeles keeps a supply of water on its side of the San Andreas, the reservoirs have been drained by the current drought—if the quake struck today, water reserves wouldn't last the maximum of six months that they would when full, she notes.

Overall, such a quake would cause some $200 billion in damage, 50,000 injuries and 2,000 deaths, the researchers estimated. But “it’s not so much about dying in the earthquake. It’s about being miserable after the earthquake and people giving up on Southern California,” says Jones. Everything a city relies on to function—water, electricity, sewage systems, telecommunications, roads—would be damaged and possibly not repaired for more than a year. Without functioning infrastructure, the local economy could easily collapse, and people would abandon Los Angeles.

“Imagine America without Los Angeles,” Jones posits. While the fictional disaster in *San Andreas* could be an additional wake-up call for Californians, Jones worries that its unrealistic scenario could lead people to believe that there’s nothing to worry about or nothing they can do about it. Moviegoers may think that scientists will be able to give them fair warning of the Big One, even though earthquake prediction is currently an impossibility.

But Californians can prepare for what will come. Jones spent most of 2014 working with the LA mayor's office to identify vulnerabilities and better prepare the city for the inevitable. The task force reported that building codes could be changed to require retrofitting of older structures so that they would withstand powerful shaking. The Los Angeles aqueduct could be fortified so that it won’t break when the San Andreas ruptures. Power, telecommunications and internet systems could be strengthened or have backup systems to ensure that people would be able to communicate. The plan would take billions of dollars and several decades to implement—and

would have to overcome many obstacles—but it would improve the city's ability to survive a quake catastrophe.

On an individual level, homeowners can retrofit their property to better hold up against shaking. People can include fire extinguishers in their earthquake kits to put out little flames before they get out of hand. And schools, businesses and families can participate in ShakeOut drills—the next one is on October 15—to practice what they'll need to do on earthquake day.

"Everyone should live every day like it could be the day of the Big One," says Field. Because any day, even today, could be that day.

Washington Post

Could 95 percent of the world's people be wrong about salt?

By Peter Whoriskey

For years, health authorities around the world have warned people that they are eating too much salt.

This salty binge is causing heart attacks and strokes, according to these warnings, and in the U.S. alone, authorities say too much salt is precipitating tens of thousands of deaths annually.

Yet the response to these warnings has been a remarkable show of dietary disobedience. An estimated 95 percent of the world's population keep eating salt in amounts officials deem excessive.

So who's right - the people, or the health authorities? The question sounds naive, but in fact, some scientists ask the very same thing, and it lurks behind the debate that has sprung up this year over the government's longstanding salt advice, which is embedded in the U.S. Dietary Guidelines.

At a major scientific conference last week in New York City, some presenters suggested that, in fact, the persistent global appetite for salt might be a sign that humans are geared for more salt than health authorities would allow.

These scientists point to new science indicating humans may be hard-wired to crave salt, and that there may be a natural appetite for it above the amounts that the government recommends. They point to the vast gap between what the authorities say is a healthy amount of salt and the amounts that people around the world are actually consuming.

The U.S. official warning on salt is "the most radical existing nutrition recommendation," said Niels Graudal, a researcher at Copenhagen University Hospital, at the New York meeting of the American Society of Hypertension.

The U.S. Dietary Guidelines currently advise people to eat less than 2,300 milligrams sodium per day, or roughly the amount that comes in one teaspoon of salt. Americans, meanwhile, consume much more than that - about 3,500 milligrams per day. Around the globe, salt consumption is above the U.S. guidelines, too - the averages ranges from 2,500 milligrams per day to 4,500 milligrams per day, according to surveys.

Not surprisingly, scientists who support government efforts to reduce sodium consumption dispute the idea of a natural appetite for high levels of salt. They say that the reason people are eating so much salt is that the corrupt modern diet makes it all too available in processed foods, especially bread.

“Our salt taste preferences are based on what we commonly eat and what we’re used to,” said Mary Cogswell, a CDC scientist. Cogswell said that since she has switched to a low-salt diet, she often finds food at restaurants too salty.

“Our need for salt is entirely hedonistic – that is, it is a pleasure but it kills you,” Graham MacGregor, a medical professor at Queen Mary University of London, and a long-time supporter of salt restrictions, said by email.

Either way, as the federal government prepares its influential Dietary Guidelines for 2015, bureaucrats must take a side in what has become a profound and heated scientific debate: They must either retract the government's longstanding salt warning, which is echoed by the American Heart Association, or they must overlook recent studies suggesting that the government advice on salt, far from helping people, might even be dangerous for the otherwise healthy.

Even some of the major health associations are now divided on the question. Earlier this month, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the largest organization of food and nutrition professionals, issued a statement expressing their concern about the science behind government’s salt advice.

“There is a distinct and growing lack of scientific consensus on making a single sodium consumption recommendation for all Americans," said Academy President Sonja L. Connor. She cited the research indicating that the low sodium consumption recommended by the government is “actually associated with increased mortality for healthy individuals.”

Exactly what is a “natural” level of salt in the diet has been a matter of debate for decades.

Early on in the debate, some scientists suggested that the natural level of salt consumption is very low, and as evidence, they pointed to some remote hunter-gatherer societies that subsist on very low levels of salt. Those peoples suffer less from cardiovascular disease. But as critics pointed out, those populations may be far too different from most of modern society to make useful comparisons.

Now some scientists are proposing just the opposite - that the "natural" level of salt consumption is higher than the government advises. Their evidence is the global surveys showing the consistently high levels of salt consumption, seemingly regardless of socioeconomic status.

“All over the world, people tend to eat a consistent amount of sodium that isn’t super high and isn’t really low,” said Joel Geerling, a researcher at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. “That doesn’t happen by chance in biology.”

The question this raises, of course, is whether this level of salt intake is somehow dictated by the human body.

Some of Geerling’s research may shed some light. For several years, he and his colleagues have been studying the brain activity in mice and rats that have been deprived of salt. In doing so, they have identified specific neurons that fire when an animal has a saltless diet.

“What our work did was put a group of neurons on the map, showing neurons that fire when you take salt out of the diet,” Geerling said. “When the animal drinks saline, those neurons stop firing, very quickly, within an hour.”

That circuitry could be the basis of a natural salt appetite in humans, and there’s at least some evidence that this natural appetite would lead animals to eat salt in amounts above the very bare minimums required for living.

For one thing, this circuitry appears to be active, at least at low levels, even when animals have been getting more than minimal amounts of salt, Geerling said. Moreover, separate research by Graudal and others indicates that when people eat the low levels of sodium recommended by the government, their bodies produce renin, a hormone that may have harmful effects on blood vessels.

So are we built to be eating salt in amounts higher than the government recommendations? Like other questions in the salt debate, there is yet no definitive answer. And even if there is some salt appetite wired into the brain, that doesn't necessarily mean that satisfying those cravings would be good for you.

But with the evidence so murky, some scientists are questioning the wisdom of the public health campaigns pushing people to alter their salty diets.

"I cannot see why the society should spend billions on sodium reduction," Graudal said.

National Review

How the Wright Brothers Reinvented the American Dream

by Lee Habeeb & Mike Leven

In *The Wright Brothers*, David McCullough’s latest book and perhaps his best, he tells the story of the two brothers who accomplished what scientists, inventors, and dreamers throughout the centuries hadn’t: They taught man how to fly.

Like most of us, McCullough knew very little about the Wright Brothers before he began the book. In an interview with NPR earlier this month, he spoke about what drew him to the story.

I knew next to nothing about them. I knew what most all of us receive quickly in about a ten-minute flash of light on the subject in high-school history or whatever. And when I began to read about them, I couldn’t get over how much there was to them individually and as a unit, as it were, and what a really extraordinary and, I think, inspiring human story they are and very, very representative of something particularly, I think, proudly American.

What made the story of these two brothers so compelling? McCullough explained:

Well, they had an objective, a purpose, which they considered to be — and this sounds like a bad pun — a high purpose, and they set their minds to achieve it. And to do it with no sense that there was any reason why they couldn’t do it, . . . they didn’t have any money, they didn’t have any political contacts, they didn’t have a great university or a foundation behind them, but they thought they could figure out what is — how it is that birds can soar. Not just fly, but soar. And the big question was how do they do that? And they had been making bicycles and selling

bicycles in their little shop in Dayton, Ohio, and, of course, bicycling is about balance, equilibrium.

Of all of those attributes, the last may have been the most important. While others toiled with the problem of mechanical power, it was because of their experience running their bicycle shop in Dayton that the Wright brothers were uniquely positioned to think about the problem of balance as it relates to flight.

What also made these two men uniquely positioned to solve this age-old problem was this: They were do-it-yourselfers. They weren't interested in theoretical approaches to solving the problem of flight. They learned the old-fashioned American way: by trial and error. McCullough explained:

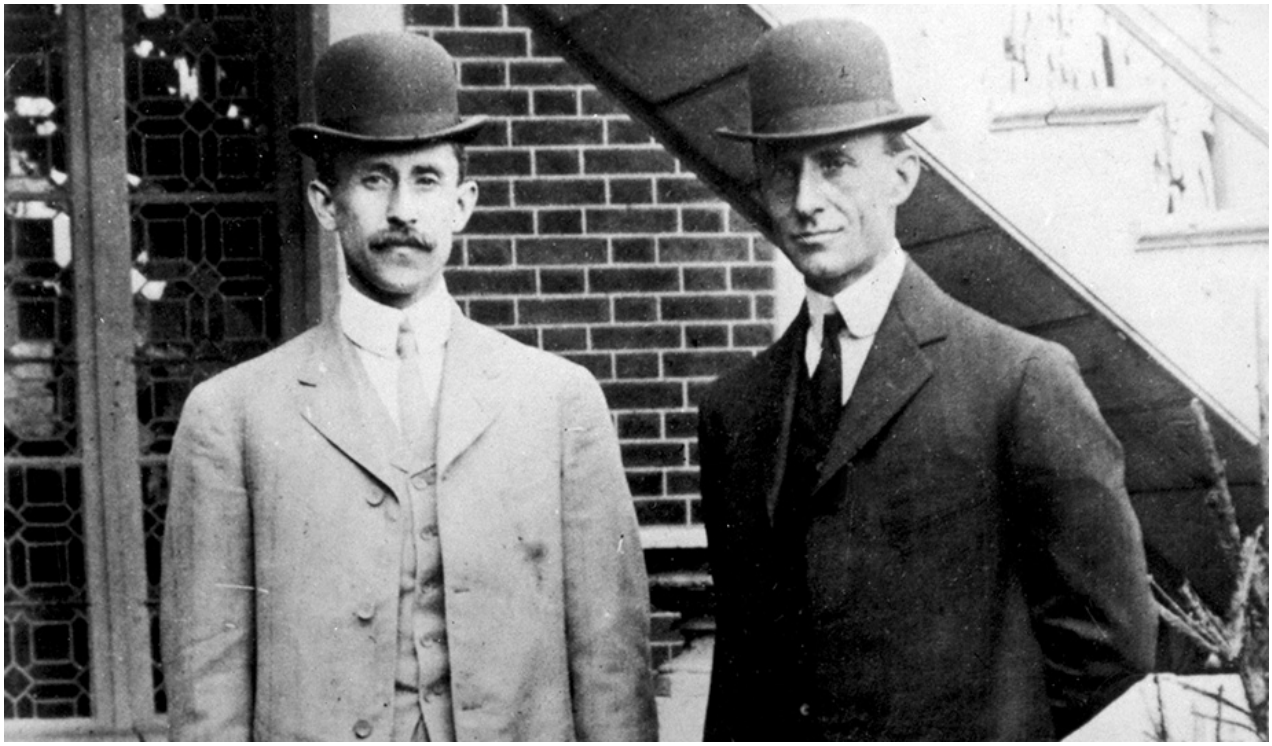
And the other very important fact that they realized is that it isn't enough just to invent theoretically or invent in fact a machine that might fly on its own power, but to know how to do it, to know how to fly just as if you made a bicycle — you can't just say here's the bicycle but you don't know how to ride it. And the only way to learn to ride a bicycle is to ride the bicycle. So they didn't just invent the airplane. They learned, as no one ever knew before, how to fly it, and that means riding with the wind and adjusting having wings that will do the necessary adjustments that will make it possible to stay in the air.

Their trial-and-error approach was not without risk. McCullough explained how these two brothers were essentially the first test pilots, precursors to men like Chuck Yeager.

Every time they went up, and they would go up 50 to 100 times in a year, they had a very good chance of being killed. And for that reason, they never flew together, because if one got killed, the other would be still alive to carry on with the mission.

"Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality that guarantees the others," according to Aristotle. And it was Wilbur and Orville's courage that most impressed McCullough, and the perseverance that their courage engendered.

Their courage is to me at times almost unfathomable. And when they're besieged by the mosquitoes down at Kitty Hawk, almost eaten alive, literally, and yet they would not leave. I would've gotten the hell out of there as fast as I could. And I think most everybody else would too. It was pure torture, but they would not give up.



What made this story most uniquely American, however, was the circumstances of their upbringing. These two men grew up without much of anything in the way of wealth or material possessions. But their social and economic status was to have no bearing on what they thought was possible because their father would have none of that. There was not a stitch of Marxist economic determinism in the Wright household. McCullough described life as the young Wright brothers knew it:

They didn't have indoor plumbing. They had no telephone, none of that. But they had books, books aplenty, and the father insisted that they read and read about everything. And he insisted that they learn how to use the English language. He insisted that their handwriting be not only legible but that their vocabulary was wide, and their use of verbs and adjectives and syntax, all that, it was as if they were having a magnificent English professor all through their lives. And this played a huge part in the success that they had.

This was a uniquely American advantage the Wright brothers enjoyed at the beginning of the 20th century, when a person's dreams were bound by his social class. They were raised to believe they could do anything.

We also learn about the role that chance — and tragedy — played in the lives of these men. It turns out that they might never have been the first in flight but for a terrible accident Wilbur suffered when he was nearing his college years. McCullough explained:

He was all set to go to Yale and he thought he wanted to be a teacher or a professor, but he got hit in the teeth with a hockey stick in a hockey game, when he was about 18, that knocked out all of his front teeth, upper front teeth, left him in terrible pain, and he slipped into a strange and unfortunate but, it turns out, very fortunate, for all of us, period where he imposed a seclusion on himself: isolation at home. And during that period, it was during that period that he began to really read, and read with not just energy and concentration, but read about everything. In a way, he got his own liberal-arts education on his own at home and with an intensity that he probably wouldn't have achieved had he gone to college, because there'd be so many other things going on.

Wilbur essentially homeschooled himself, and his life — and his brother's — took an entirely different turn.

To the interviewer's point that the brothers' story was distinctly American, McCullough responded.

I feel very strongly, yes, it is very distinctly American, Midwestern American at that time. I saw — kept feeling it as I was writing this book — clear linkages or similarities to Harry Truman. Truman never went to college, they never went to college. Truman faced adversity again and again in his life, as did they. Truman failed many times in many ways but never let that defeat him or discourage him completely. So did they. I think how you handle failure, how you handle a sudden unexpected blow that knocks you down, is crucial, not only to leadership but success.

It turns out that Wilbur and Orville Wright had two other advantages in their quest for flight: location and time. McCullough explained why being born in Dayton — and living in early 20th-century America — was a blessing for the two young men.

It was a little bit like the Silicon Valley of today, in that — well, most of the industrial cities of the country were — because all kinds of new things were coming into being. The telephone, the light bulb, the elevator, it — the cash register. And it was a very positive time. We weren't at war. We were about to build the Panama Canal. We had no national debt. We had a national surplus. And to have been in Dayton, Ohio, if you were a mechanical — mechanically inclined or interested in a mechanical or industrial or scientific innovation, was to be in the hotbed of where it was all happening. So they were — it was a renaissance time, if you will.

The story of the Wright Brothers was also a story about the efficacy of "government investment." It turns out that the head of the Smithsonian Institution, Samuel Langley, who himself was himself an inventor and a renowned scientist, put a team of the best and the brightest minds

together to launch a manned-flight project, and put some serious government money behind the project.

Only it didn't pan out. The project, which cost some $70,000 — a large sum at the time — was a complete disaster, McCullough explained. "The Langley project unfortunately deterred the government from taking a serious interest in the Wrights because they really wasted so much money on something that didn't work at all," McCullough explained.

'We didn't suppose the aeroplane could ever be practical outside the realm of sport,' Orville Wright said. 'It was the sport of the thing that appealed to Will and me.'

Not that the Wright brothers would have taken the help. They thought that outside investment — from either the public sector or the private sector — would mean that they had relinquished control of their day-to-day work and decision-making. So they used their own money, and used it judiciously, rather than answer to any outsiders.

If you think the scientific elites fared poorly in this story, you'll love the way the media elites came off. It turns out that, believing that a couple of bike-shop owners could not possibly do what they'd claimed to have done, never bothered to check out their story. But Amos Root, a writer with an interest in scientific pursuits, a guy who made a small fortune making beekeepers' equipment, went down to Dayton to see things for himself. McCullough explained what happened next.

He wrote a superb article describing the flight that he saw. It wasn't only very descriptive. It was very accurate, and of considerable length. The first full accurate, fair reporting of this phenomenon that changed history was written by a beekeeper, published in his little newspaper.

That's right. It took a beekeeper to break the biggest science story of the year. But there's more:

Root then sent his story to *Scientific American*, saying, You're free to publish this at no charge, and they just dismissed it as the writings of some whacko out in Ohio. The arrogance, the superiority of those who were in the know, again and again, in the government, in journalism, was almost comical.

Our government elites weren't much interested in the story, either. McCullough described the situation:

Our federal-government people wouldn't even get on the train and ride out and take a look when the Wrights offered to bring their machine to Washington to demonstrate. No, not interested. They had their door slammed in their face about three or four times, and then a delegation of French officers from Paris showed up in Dayton, liked what they were able to determine, and said, You bring your plane over to France, demonstrate for us in public what you can do, and we'll buy your machine.

You heard that right. It took the government of France to recognize America's latest great inventor. Wilbur was given a hero's welcome in France, McCullough explained:

Biggest hero, most popular American in France since Benjamin Franklin. They loved him. They adored them. And the fact that he spoke no French seemed to make him even more popular, because he was so American. They wanted the American to act like an American. And his modesty, his attention to hard work, his honesty, his character.

The “c” word appeared again and again in this interview because the Wright brothers’ story is a story about character. “Character counts again and again and again,” McCullough said. And McCullough loved the character of both men. He described them this way:

They weren’t in it to become famous or to become rich. They were in it to do it right. And their attention to detail and their — they not only didn’t like the limelight, they tried to avoid it whenever possible. But eventually they did fly. They broke every record that had ever been broken, including many of their own right over here.

This was also a distinctly American idea. These brothers were, in the end, hobbyists, driven not by fame or wealth but by the challenge. “If we had been interested in invention with the idea of profit,” Orville Wright told his first biographer in 1939, “we most assuredly would have tried something in which the chances for success were brighter. You see, we did not expect in the beginning to go beyond gliding.”

Orville continued: “Even later we didn’t suppose the aeroplane could ever be practical outside the realm of sport. It was the sport of the thing that appealed to Will and me. The question was not of money from flying but how we could get money enough to keep on entertaining ourselves with it.”

Perhaps McCullough’s most revealing story about the nature of the Wright brothers centered around their early days in Kitty Hawk. They were two unknown tinkerers far from home, testing their ideas in the sloping sand dunes of North Carolina. The locals didn’t know what to think: Most thought the brothers were a bit crazy. Their days were filled with setback after setback — and some small advances. The work was dangerous, and the infestation of bugs, as noted earlier, unfathomable. And yet the men, McCullough points out, looked back at those years with the greatest fondness:

And the odd thing is that after years or even after months, they would talk about that time on Kitty Hawk as the best time of their lives, because they were in the midst of the work. Their love of work, their passion for their work, their joy in their work: There’s a great lesson to be learned for all of us in that.

Those lessons may be the best things we learn from this remarkable story: that you don’t need fancy degrees or social status to achieve great things, that work is fun, that money isn’t everything, and that there is something unique about this thing we call the American character.

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NY Times

The Small, Happy Life

by David Brooks

A few weeks ago, I asked readers to send in essays describing their purpose in life and how they found it. A few thousand submitted contributions, and many essays are online. I’ll write more about the lessons they shared in the weeks ahead, but one common theme surprised me.

I expected most contributors would follow the commencement-speech clichés of our high-achieving culture: dream big; set ambitious goals; try to change the world. In fact, a surprising number of people found their purpose by going the other way, by pursuing the small, happy life.

Elizabeth Young once heard the story of a man who was asked by a journalist to show his most precious possession. The man, Young wrote, “was proud and excited to show the journalist the gift he had been bequeathed. A banged up tin pot he kept carefully wrapped in cloth as though it was fragile. The journalist was confused, what made this dingy old pot so valuable? ‘The message,’ the friend replied. The message was ‘we do not all have to shine.’ This story resonated deeply. In that moment I was able to relieve myself of the need to do something important, from which I would reap praise and be rewarded with fulfillment. My vision cleared.”

Young continues, “I have always wanted to be effortlessly kind. I wanted to raise children who were kind.” She notes that among those who survived the Nazi death camps, a predominant quality she noticed was generosity.

“Perhaps,” she concludes, “the mission is not a mission at all. ... Everywhere there are tiny, seemingly inconsequential circumstances that, if explored, provide meaning” and chances to be generous and kind. Spiritual and emotional growth happens in microscopic increments.

Kim Spencer writes, “I used to be one of the solid ones — one of the people whose purpose was clearly defined and understood. My purpose was seeing patients and ‘saving lives.’ I have melted into the in-between spaces, though. Now my purpose is simply to be the person ... who can pick up the phone and give you 30 minutes in your time of crisis. I can give it to you today and again in a few days. ... I can edit your letter. ... I can listen to you complain about your co-worker. ... I can look you in the eye and give you a few dollars in the parking lot. I am not upset if you cry. I am no longer drowning, so I can help keep you afloat with a little boost. Not all of the time, but every once in a while, until you find other people to help or a different way to swim. It is no skin off my back; it is easy for me.”

Terence J. Tollaksen wrote that his purpose became clearer once he began to recognize the “decision trap”: “This trap is an amazingly consistent phenomena whereby ‘big’ decisions turn out to have much less impact on a life as a whole than the myriad of small seemingly insignificant ones.”

Tollaksen continues, “I have always admired those goal-oriented, stubborn, successful, determined individuals; they make things happen, and the world would be lost without them.” But, he explains, he has always had a “small font purpose.”

“I can say it worked for me. I know it sounds so Midwest, but it’s been wonderful. I have a terrific wife, 5 kids, friends from grade school and high school, college, army, friends locally, and sometimes, best of all, horses, dogs, and cats. Finally, I have a small industrial business that I started and have run for 40 years based on what I now identify as principles of ‘Pope Francis capitalism.’ ”

Hans Pitsch wrote: “At age 85, the question of meaning in my life is urgent. The question of the purpose of my life is another matter. World War II and life in general have taught me that outcomes from our actions or inactions are often totally unpredictable and random.”

He adds, “I am thankful to be alive. I have a responsibility to myself and those around me to give meaning to my life from day to day. I enjoy my family (not all of them) and the shrinking number of old friends. You use the term ‘organizing frame’ in one’s life. I am not sure if I want to be

framed by an organizing principle, but if there is one thing that keeps me focused, it's the garden. Lots of plants died during the harsh winter, but, amazingly, the clematises and the roses are back, and lettuce, spinach and tomatoes are thriving in the new greenhouse. The weeping cherry tree in front of the house succumbed to old age. I still have to plant a new tree this year."

This scale of purpose is not for everyone, but there is something beautiful and concrete and well-proportioned about tending that size of a garden.□

Daily News

Florida Fisherman catches 552 pound Grouper

by Joel Landau

Next time he should bring a bigger boat.

A Florida man made a once in a lifetime catch when he reeled in a 552-pound grouper fish May 20 while sitting on a kayak in Sanibel, Fla.

Jon Black, owner of Crazy Lure Bait & Tackle shop in Cape Coral, and Capt. Ben Chancey were filming a spot for the online fishing show "Chew On This" and were trying to land a big catch while on the tiny one person kayak.

Be careful what you wish for.

The online video shows Black floating by a pier in his green vessel when he started to feel the strong tug on his line. He battled for some time before he finally pulled up the large fish and him and Chancey cheered.

"I broke the rod!" Black screeched. "Oh, Jesus."

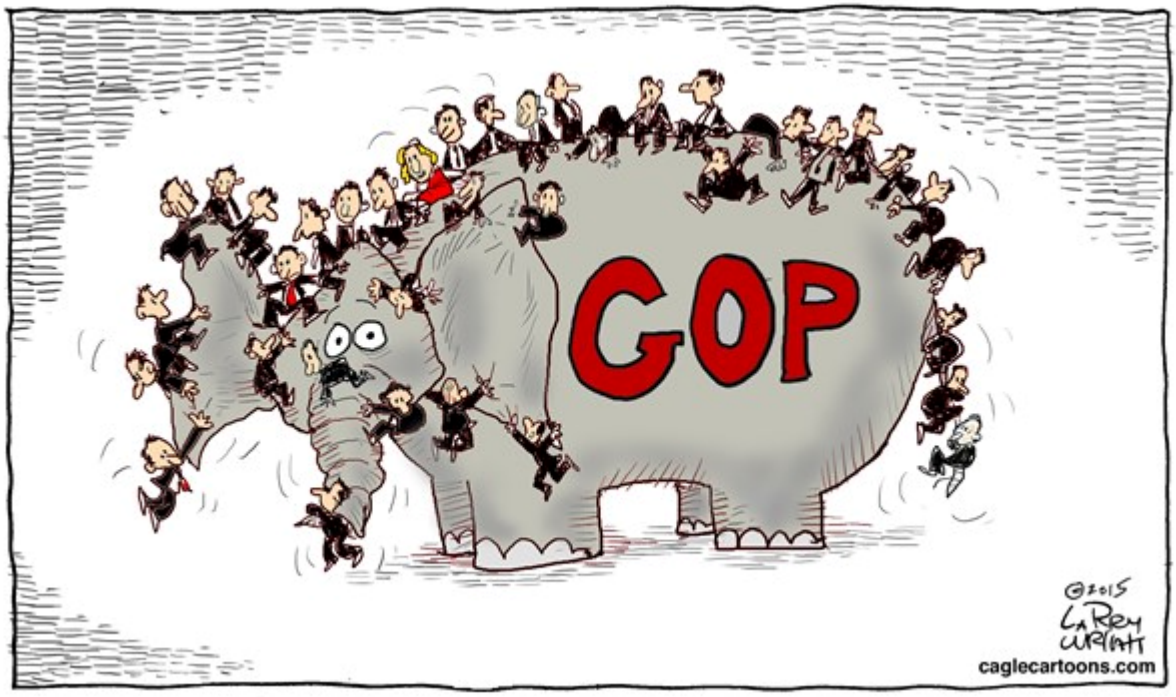
The two men believe they set the record for the largest fish caught on a kayak. They measured it at 83 inches long and more than 73 inches in girth and estimated it weighed 552 pounds. It was then returned to the water.

Black's store warned on its Facebook page that fishing for large marine animals from a kayak is very dangerous.

But a week after reeling in the goliath grouper, Black isn't resting on his laurels.

An employee at the store told the Daily News Wednesday morning Black was out fishing and could not be reached for comment.

"Loan-sharking, extortion, and racketeering are fine for now, but someday I'd like to get into soccer."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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH
LET'S STEER CLEAR. THIS CROWD COULD GET UGLY!
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BRITISH SURVEY

A recent survey in the United Kingdom asked the following question:

Are there too many foreigners in this country now?

Answer:

18% said: YES

82% said: معهد الأمن العالمي بواشنط

FRIENDS OF IRONY

How To Prepare Tofu
Step 1: Throw it in the Trash
Step 2: Grill some Meat