

The Gadsden Times

Ignore the negativity, things aren't that bad

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As we near the holiday season, Christmas and New Year's, there is much to be thankful for, beginning with our health. At my advanced age, many of my friends are victims of the vagaries of becoming a super senior. But we live in a country that still appreciates and honors its senior citizens. I can't believe how many younger individuals now hold the door for me, and it is appreciated. It is a privilege, and a privilege I cherish, to grow old in the South.

There is a doom and gloom message coming from the national media, with few exceptions. However, an article in the Dec. 17 Wall Street Journal by Johan Norberg, senior fellow at the Cato Institute, debunked much of the negativism coming from the purveyors of distorted commentary.

Norberg says things aren't that bad. In his article, entitled "The 2010s Have Been Amazing," he says that the 2010s have been the best decade ever, and he gives examples to prove his statement. As a matter of fact, he says the evidence is overwhelming. The United Nations Development report warns about inequality being negative, but in the same report states, "The gap in basic living standards is narrowing, with an unprecedented number of people in the world escaping poverty, hunger and disease." That's a contradiction in terms.

The World Bank reports that the worldwide rate of extreme poverty declined by more than half, from 18.2% to 8.6%, between 2008 and 2018. Last year, the World Data Lab calculated that for the first time, more than half the world's population can be considered "middle class." Life expectancy has increased by 3 years in the past 10 years thanks to the prevention of childhood deaths. Just think how much more life expectancy would have increased if the drug and murder rate in the United States had been under control.

Chad, an African nation, has reduced its child mortality rate by 56%, and it is the worst performing country in the world, while South Korea reduced its child mortality rate by 98%.

Global warming and pollution remain a challenge, but Norberg said in spite of all the negative chatter, death rates because of air pollution declined by almost a fifth worldwide and a by quarter in China between 2007 and 2017. He further states that wealthy societies are well positioned to develop clean technologies and to deal with the problems of a changing climate.

Annual deaths from climate related disasters declined by one-third between 2000-09 and 2010-15 to 0.35 per 100,000 people, according to the International database of Disasters, a 95% reduction since the 1960s.

Some people think because the U.S. pulled out of the Paris Global Warming Treaty, it has stopped efforts to prevent global warming. Not so. Just look at the efforts of the automotive industry in its determination to create a market for electric automobiles.

The change to electric will be a monumental reduction in greenhouse emissions. Power companies are decommissioning coal-fired electrical generating plants. The U.S. has probably, at this stage of the game, done more for world emissions reduction than the rest of the world combined.

There also has been significant progress made in the health care field. The incidence of malaria in Africa has declined about 60% from 2007 to 2017, and anti-viral therapy has reduced deaths from HIV/AIDS by more than half. Rotary International has almost eradicated polio through concentrated efforts from their members. Norberg says the advancements made by the world's societies is his case for optimism. "Tin-pot strongmen, looting politicians and punctilious bureaucrats make mischief with societies and economies. But mankind creates faster than they can squander, and repairs more than they can destroy." Sounds familiar!

As I stated at the beginning of this commentary, we have a lot to be thankful for and sometimes, as in Norberg's case, somebody needs to tell us. The U.S. is still a wonderful place to live.

Merry Christmas and a have a safe and wonderful 2020!