

One oil spill that never stops

Anene Ejikeme
NewYorkTimes.com

Imagine if an environmental catastrophe like the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico occurred every year, in the same place, for decades, said Anene Ejikeme. That's "what residents of Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta have been living with" since 1958. Since oil exploration began there a half-century ago, multinational oil companies have spilled roughly 13 million barrels of oil—about 50 times the amount spilled in the *Exxon Valdez* disaster. The consequences have been devastating. "Dead fish and oily water are part of daily life for Niger Delta residents, as are gas flares" that perpetually illuminate the night sky. Local people cook, drink, and wash with badly polluted water. Since they are dirt-poor and powerless, neither oil companies nor the Nigerian government show much concern for the continuing catastrophe. Royal Dutch Shell operates in 100 countries around the world, yet 40 percent of all of its oil spills happen in Nigeria, where companies operate "with little or no oversight from the government." Shell, the largest operator in the Delta, doubled its oil spillage from 2007 to 2008, then doubled it again from 2008 to 2009. Does anyone care?

13 trillion reasons to cut the deficit

Michael Tanner
New York Post

It's a number that's so big, it's "almost impossible to process," said Michael Tanner. This week, the federal debt officially passed the \$13 trillion mark. To make this "outlandish debt" less of an abstraction, consider that if you earned a dollar every second, it would take you 416,000 years to pay it off. And that's not the half of it: The \$13 trillion figure vastly understates the hole we're digging for our children and grandchildren, since it doesn't include \$15.8 trillion in unfunded liabilities for Social Security and at least a \$50 trillion shortfall for Medicare. "There's no way to tax our way out of this mess": Just keeping up with current spending would require raising the tax rate on the rich to 88 percent and on the middle class to 63 percent. No sane person believes "the economy can survive that kind of taxation." That means Washington has to do what Democrats and Republicans alike have been unable to do for years: Stop the runaway spending. Unless we want to follow Greece down the road to insolvency, "someone is going to have to have the courage to say 'No.'"

Sanitizing American history

Raul A. Reyes
The Christian Science Monitor

Arizona is targeting Latinos again, said Raul Reyes. Just weeks after enacting a law requiring people who are stopped by police to show proof of their immigration status, the state has now outlawed ethnic studies classes, such as the Mexican-American studies program offered in Tucson. A new law forbids courses "designed for students of a particular ethnic group," on the grounds that such classes "promote resentment" toward white Americans, encourage "ethnic chauvinism," and incite "the overthrow of the U.S. government." Yes, they're serious. It's just another blatant attempt to capitalize on white Arizonans' resentment of Latinos. But it's both absurd and impractical to ban any course that could promote class or racial resentment. To follow this logic, schools should not teach African-Americans about slavery, Asian-Americans about World War II internment camps, or Native Americans about this country's ugly treatment of their ancestors. Pretending that white racism and "ethnic chauvinism" played no part in our nation's history may please certain voters, but it's demonstrably false. Why make it illegal to tell students the truth?

It must be true ...
I read it in the tabloids

■ Florida police are seeking the owner of a prosthetic leg that recently washed up in Jacksonville Beach. Police Sgt. Thomas Bingham said the limb is a left leg, and that it probably belongs to a member of the country music community. "There are no markings on it except for a Willie Nelson sticker," said Bingham. "It's kind of hard to forget."

■ Ozzy Osbourne, who admits he spent 40 years on a drunken, drug-fueled bender, has been hired by the London *Sunday Times* to write a column of health advice. At first, Osbourne says, he thought the newspaper was joking, but then realized that decades of drinking four bottles of cognac a day, binging on 42 kinds of prescription drugs, and various near-death experiences gave him unique qualifications for the job. "I'm a medical miracle," Osbourne says. "I've seen literally thousands of doctors over my life. When I die, I should donate my body to the Natural History Museum."

■ Prison officials in Washington state say they discovered an astonishing stash of contraband materials hidden inside an inmate's rectum. When Gavin Stanger, 24, was booked into the Chelan County jail last week, guards discovered he'd used a body

