

Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

- * Pinball was banned in most major cities from the early 1940s to the mid-1970s because it was considered a game of chance and, therefore, gambling.
- * Oysters can change genders back and forth.
- * The Zildjian Company was founded in 1623 by Avedis Zildjian, an Armenian alchemist who ended up making a cymbal instead.
- * Tobacco companies spend the most money on advertising in January, when many people make a New Year's resolution to quit smoking, but the largest increase in new smokers actually occurs in the summer.
- * There's a national pillow-fighting tournament in Japan.
- * A 43,000-square-foot room beneath the Lincoln Memorial that was forgotten about until 1974 is filled with concrete columns and has its own plant life and ecosystem, as well as graffiti from the original workers.
- * Humans are comprised of about 30 of the 118 elements on the periodic table. Their iPhones, however, are made up of about 75 elements.
- * Intelligent people have more traces of copper and zinc in their hair.
- * The manchineel tree is one of the most toxic trees in the world. Its sap causes blisters, eating its apples can be potentially fatal, and the smoke from a burning manchineel can cause blindness.
- * Pythagoras, of Pythagorean Theorem fame, ran a commune that was forbidden to wear wool, forced to put their right sandal on before their left, and believed that beans could contain the souls of the dead, so even crushing a bean was considered murder.
- * Every day, around 18 acres of pizza are eaten in America.
- * At the U.S. Open and other U.S.-based tennis tournaments, the men play with the slower, heavy-duty felt balls while the women play with the faster, regular-duty felt version.

Thought for the Day: "Everyone knows something I do not; therefore, everyone is my teacher." -- Unknown
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Chuck Schumer's Jan. 6 Cynicism

On Jan. 6, 2021, rioters seeking to disrupt the counting of electoral votes breached the U.S. Capitol and rampaged for hours before order was restored.

This was a disgraceful spectacle that shouldn't be repeated, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer knows just what is needed to respond to the moment -- passing every progressive voting-related priority that can possibly be jammed through the Senate on an extremely narrow, partisan vote.

The defense of our democracy, Schumer maintains, demands nothing less.

The latest pitch for the Democratic voting agenda is more cynical and detached from reality than ever. We are to believe that the only way to counteract the furies unleashed on Jan. 6 is by imposing same-day voter registration and no-excuse mail voting on the states, ending partisan gerrymandering, and requiring the counting of ballots that arrive up to seven days after Election Day, among other provisions completely irrelevant to events that day or afterward.

If you're thinking that Democrats supported all of this on Jan. 5 of last year and still supported it on Jan. 7, you're correct.

Their agenda has as much to do with Jan. 6 as an annual appropriations bill or the naming of a post office.

The Democratic drive to nationalize our elections has always been a sweepingly radical step in search of an alleged crisis to address. When a version was first introduced a few years ago, it was sold as addressing "the vile voter suppression practices" of the GOP, in the words of The New York Times. The big lie of the time was that the Georgia gubernatorial campaign of Stacey Abrams in 2018 was undone by such practices. Now, the justification is the Capitol riot and subsequent GOP state-level voting changes that have been portrayed, falsely, as the return of Jim Crow.

In reality, voting has never been easier and voters have never had so many options for how to participate in elections, whether early in-person voting, traditional same-day voting, or mail-in voting. There are partisan disputes about how to strike a balance between convenience and security, but there is no reason that these differences can't be debated at the state level, with the balance struck differently depending on the policy preferences of elected officials in each state.

Limits on drop boxes or measures to tighten up the identification requirements around mail-in ballots aren't suppressing the vote.

The true weakness of the system that was highlighted last year on Jan. 6 is the poorly drafted Electoral Count Act. It should be revised to make it explicit that the vice president can't decide which electoral votes to count and that states can't discard the popular vote if the outcome isn't to their liking. Even though changes along these lines might get bi-partisan support, Schumer is pushing to eliminate the filibuster to pass the progressive wish list of electoral non-sequiturs (although a few provisions, like prohibiting the intimidation of election officials, have been added to the Democratic package to address the 2020 post-election fight).

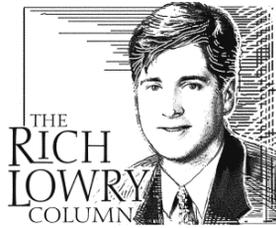
To wrap this push in the bloody shirt of Jan. 6 is opportunistic and irresponsible and can only serve to convince even more Republicans that the outrage over that day is in the service of a nakedly partisan agenda.

Schumer has an uphill climb to convince relatively moderate Democrats Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema to go along with kneecapping the filibuster. If the New York senator were to succeed, he would have blown a hole in the traditional practices of the Senate and set the precedent for Republicans -- should they achieve unified control of Washington in 2024 -- to impose all their own favored electoral policies on the states.

This yin and yang wouldn't do anything to restore faith in democracy, rather the opposite. But Chuck Schumer is on a mission to achieve, and to use, the power to rewrite the country's electoral rules -- justifications and consequences be damned.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.

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Spleen Screens Bacteria and Spent Blood Cells From Body

DEAR DR. ROACH: I had an abdominal X-ray to check on my gallstones, and was surprised to find an enlarged spleen. I was told it might be leukemia or lymphoma! I was sent to an oncologist, who reassured me that I did not have cancer and recommended I get checked again in six months. My doctor checked it after three, and my spleen had gone back down!



What is all this with the spleen? People have it removed after injuries, like accidents. It seems to be insignificant, but can it be an omen for cancer? -- M.K.

ANSWER: The spleen is an underappreciated abdominal organ. Its major job is to filter and remove old or damaged red blood cells, but it also removes bacteria. In addition, the spleen acts as a very large lymph node, allowing infection-fighting white blood cells to gather and activate. Removal of the spleen leaves people at a higher risk of some kinds of bacterial infections.

Enlargement of the spleen has many potential causes. Both liver and heart disease can cause passive congestion of the spleen with blood. Cancer, especially lymphoma, is a common cause, but infection is one cause to consider in a person in whom the spleen enlarges and then returns to normal. There are many less-common causes as well.

If the spleen is removed or is nonfunctional (this is almost universal in adults with sickle cell disease, for example), then infections are common, and vaccinations have a different and more intensive schedule, ideally given when the spleen is still in place and working.

It is probably worth it for your doctor to continue to keep an eye on.

DEAR DR. ROACH: An acquaintance has recently (within the past two years) been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. She is now using a "cell membrane stabilizing" diet. Is this likely to help her? Is there any evidence that it works? -- S.P.M.

ANSWER: Although I wasn't able to find anything about a specific diet with that name, I reviewed the literature on the effects of diet on Parkinson's disease, and the data are still preliminary. For most of the recommendations I have, there are conflicting reports.

Of the dietary factors with the best data, I found that fruits and vegetables are likely to be helpful and to protect against damage to the part of the brain affected by PD. Omega-3 fatty acids were found to be helpful in animal models of PD. Products high in soy protein and caffeine (especially from tea) may have some benefit. Again, these data are not strong, so I am not recommending a dramatic change in the diet solely to protect against PD. However, fruits and vegetables are certainly of benefit for multiple systems, and I am comfortable recommending a diet high in those.

Milk and other dairy products have been shown in some, but not all, studies to have a detrimental effect on PD.

Diet is of importance in many areas of health, but the role in PD seems to be modest, based on current literature. As always, a visit with a registered dietitian nutritionist is worthwhile to get specific and personalized information.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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