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The right's wrong-way governing

This will be no ordinary Congress, so there are no ordinary ways for judging how effective it will be at governing.

That is, in any event, a preposterous standard to hold up as a brand-spanking-new goal. Isn't governing what Congress was supposed to be doing all along? Imagine an everyday citizen making a New Year's resolution promising that this year, for a change, he or she would actually show up for work.

The problem for the Republicans who now control both the House and the Senate is that they are divided between their right and their far right. The number of bona fide moderates can be counted on one hand — although, if you wanted to be generous, you might get to a second hand. As a result, the Republicans' own measure of success will be out of line not only with President Obama's priorities but also with what most middle-of-the-road Americans would take as a reasonable test of what it means for government to work.



House Speaker John Boehner

House Speaker John Boehner's battle to hang on to his job is instructive. Boehner (R-Ohio) prevailed, but 25 Republicans on the right end of his caucus opposed his reelection. These 25 almost certainly spoke for at least 40 or 50 members who think of Boehner as some sort of sellout for his occasional willingness to pass bills with Democratic votes. Because Boehner worries most about pressure from his right, his definition of where the "middle" lies will necessarily be distorted.

The notion of Boehner as a moderate is belied by the new House rules he and the Republican leadership have concocted. They're designed to rig the legislative playing field in favor of right-leaning policy.

One example: The new rules would provide for "dynamic scoring" of tax cuts, which sounds very cool and forward-looking but for the fact that they aim to assert tax cuts won't cost what they'll actually cost. This, in turn, will make it easier for the Republicans to shower money on their favored constituencies while pretending to be fiscally responsible. Dynamic scoring, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities noted, "could facilitate congressional passage of large rate cuts in tax reform by making the rate cuts appear — on paper — less expensive than under a traditional cost estimate."

To understand the dynamic-scoring game, imagine a formula based on the idea that because infrastructure spending boosts the economy — which it most certainly does — we should pretend that an expenditure of \$100 billion is actually, say, only \$80 billion. Proving that this is about ideology and not economics, as Rep. John Delaney (D-Md.) pointed out this week, the Republican rule doesn't apply dynamic scoring to discretionary spending.

For good measure, the House leadership included another rule flatly designed to force cuts to Social Security's disability program. If Republicans want to debate such cuts, fine, but don't sneak them in through the fine print.

Then there is the move by both House and Senate Republicans to change the employer mandate in the Affordable Care Act. Currently, employers with 50 or more full-time workers have to provide health insurance to employees who work 30 hours or more, or pay a fine. Republicans want to limit the mandate to Americans who work 40 hours or more. In USA Today this week, Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) wrote that the purpose of the change is "so more people can work full time."

But the change would have exactly the opposite effect. Currently, only 7 percent of American workers put in between 30 and 34 hours a week, but 44 percent work 40 hours a week. In other words, wrote Yuval Levin, a conservative policy analyst and a foe of Obamacare, altering the law in this way "would likely put far, far more people at risk of having their hours cut than leaving it at 30 hours." So much for more people working "full time."

Keep in mind that all these ideas come from the Republican mainstream, the people who tell us they are interested in "governing" and being "reasonable."

How far have the goal posts been moved in the GOP? Just because Boehner and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) say they want to avoid government shut-downs and debt-ceiling hostage-taking, they are to be regarded as heroes of sane policymaking. But if we've sunk so low that this is now the test of "governance," we are still a long way from the real thing.

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CHARLES LANE

The defenders of freedom

The pursuit of poking fun has become something more profound

Suddenly, satire is the great issue of our time.

Last month, North Korea's Stalinist dictatorship launched a cyber-attack, accompanied by threats of physical violence, against the makers and distributors of a silly film that dared to violate the cult of personality surrounding Kim Jong Un, according to the FBI. Pyongyang's alleged hack succeeded, at least temporarily, in blocking the movie's release.

And on Wednesday, there was the slaughter of 12 people in Paris, mostly staff members of Charlie Hebdo, a weekly newspaper that delighted in mocking the prophet Muhammad, who were gunned down by masked men crying "Allahu Akbar" and "We have avenged the prophet."

It turns out that such political jesters take big risks, bigger than perhaps even they realize or anticipate — and the repercussions affect us all.

Yet it is vitally important that the United States and all other Western democracies rally to their unequivocal defense.

If freedom means anything, it means freedom of expression — to include expression that some might find irresponsible, offensive or even blasphemous. In the realm of art and ideas, pretty much nothing is, or should be, sacred, lest we head down the slippery slope to censorship, or self-censorship.

Obvious as that principle might seem, Western politicians have been a bit wobbly about it in recent times.

In September 2012, when Islamist extremists rioted across the Middle East, ostensibly because they took offense at a crude Internet video mocking Muhammad, Charlie Hebdo fired back by making fun of Muhammad in its own pages. The French foreign minister accused the editors of pouring "oil on the fire." President Obama's spokesman questioned the publication's "judgment."

To be sure, both officials quickly added that Charlie Hebdo had a right to publish what it wanted and that no mere publication or video could justify violence.

Yet their mixed messages unavoidably implied that the rioters had a valid point, which is never something you want to imply — at least not if you understand how dangerous it is to give violent extremists a veto over what your citizens can and cannot say.

Here's an irony: Americans and Europeans have spent much of the past year and a half debating how to rein in the potential threat that the National Security Agency's electronic surveillance poses to privacy and freedom.

Yet in that time, the worst actual assaults on freedom of expression in the West have been carried out by the totalitarian, nuclear-armed North Korean state and, now, in Paris, by Islamist terrorists — that is, the very people against whom the NSA is supposed to

protect.

In fact, if you wanted to fault the "surveillance state" for anything, in light of these events, it might be for being insufficiently comprehensive.

The Paris massacre reminds us once again that there are real threats to democracy, from states and organizations that regard freedom itself as evil, and that Western democracies need strong intelligence, police and military

Ordinary Americans, too, eventually roused themselves to assert their rights, despite the (admittedly implausible) threats of North Korean-backed violence. They went to see "The Interview" in art-house theaters or ordered it online.

Of course, these demonstrations of civil courage were trivial in comparison with the routine bravery Charlie Hebdo's editorial director, Stéphane Char-



Charlie Hebdo's offices were firebombed after it published this 2011 issue announcing the prophet Muhammad as a guest editor. The cartoon reads: "100 lashes if you don't die of laughter."

institutions, appropriately restrained by law, to counter those threats.

Ultimately, though, security and law enforcement cannot substitute for clarity about our own values.

Fortunately, there has been some progress on that front. Perhaps learning from the futility of his administration's equivocations about the Muhammad video in 2012, Obama responded forthrightly to North Korea's alleged cyberattack: "If somebody is able to intimidate us out of releasing a satirical movie, imagine what they start doing once they see a documentary that they don't like or news reports that they don't like."

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France's day of horror

BY JIM HOAGLAND

The slaughter by Islamic fanatics on Wednesday of nearly a dozen French journalists, several of whom I have known for decades, is a bitter, heavy price for that nation to pay for being what it is: a haven of free expression and intellectual combat; a country that has taken in the foreign-born more easily than most and worked, if imperfectly, to assimilate them; and a military power willing to fight enemies abroad in the name of universal values.

The gunmen who staged the massacre at the Charlie Hebdo newspaper will have acted to punish France for one or

call to take strong preventive action. The United States has proved that pitfalls of overreaction await on such a path.

But even if it comes in the form of smaller attacks against the "soft targets" of defenseless artists in France or subway commuters in Spain and England, the war of terror that jihadist groups have declared on Western ways of life will now make security as much a preoccupation for Europeans as it has been for Americans for 13-plus years.

That concern has, of course, been growing in European chanceries. When I asked French Prime Minister Manuel Valls in September if he feared that a European 9/11 could be mounted by

conflicts were directly related to the attack on Charlie Hebdo. It is more likely that this bloodshed was payback of a particularly brutal kind for the magazine's repeated mockery of the thugs and quacks who have taken over some Islamic movements and leveled death sentences against anyone who disagrees with their perverted interpretations of Islam.

In one sense, the brilliant cartoonists who died Wednesday were indirect victims of globalization and the communication revolution, of the electronic rubbing up against each other of societies at different levels of development and of the backlash this has created from narrow-minded and brutal men who prefer to kill than to lose any control. The struggle is broader, and more civilizational, than even Valls, a tough-minded and effective political leader, may have foreseen only a few months ago.

France has, in some ways, a tougher task in reacting to this day of calculated terror and destruction. Americans immediately understood 9/11 as a foreign attack against the homeland. We did not have to — and still do not — worry about "an enemy within." It will require great care, and great skill, to prevent the Charlie Hebdo attack from becoming a point of division. Brilliant individually, French politicians will need to develop an unfamiliar unity of purpose in the months ahead. And they will need the help of their European neighbors.

The killers were no doubt ignorant, or uncaring, of the fact that Charlie Hebdo (and other characteristically French publications) meted out the same satire to France's own leaders and self-important citizens. I came to know some of the artists killed yesterday when I did an article in 1965 about Hara-Kiri, the satirical publication that changed its name to Charlie Hebdo after a distinctly unsympathetic obituary of Charles de Gaulle touched off a national uproar.

They changed the name but not the spirit, the wit and the very Frenchness of their magazine. And for that they should be remembered as intellectual heroes.

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ERIC FEFERBERG/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE VIA GETTY IMAGES

People light candles at a Wednesday-night vigil in Paris.

all of those traits. To have such enemies is to France's profound honor. To ensure that such bestial behavior is not repeated or seen as anything other than what it is becomes France's most urgent national mission.

"This is a mini-9/11 for us," Philippe Labro, a leading French author of fiction and journalism, told me Wednesday by phone as he mourned a number of friends who perished in the attack. "It has that same sense of initial horror and then of the determination to overcome what has been done to us. We are at war."

Other Europeans may not welcome even this appropriately limited comparison to America's day of horror and the

Europeans returning from fighting with jihadists in Syria and Iraq, I expected that even the straight-talking Valls might duck the question. Instead, he immediately said yes and outlined his reasons.

"We have to be vigilant every day against the development of an enemy within," he said, noting that he had just steered through Parliament a law restricting travel to conflict zones by French terrorism suspects. He estimated that 1,000 French citizens were fighting in Syria, along with about "3,000 British citizens, some Germans, Italians and others."

But it is not clear that the Middle East

GEORGE F. WILL

Climate change of old

We know, because they often say so, that those who think catastrophic global warming is probable and perhaps imminent are exemplary empiricists. They say those who disagree with them are "climate change deniers" disrespectful of science.

Actually, however, something about which everyone can agree is that of course the climate is changing — it always is. And if climate Cassandras are as conscientious as they claim to be about weighing evidence, how do they accommodate historical evidence of enormously consequential episodes of climate change not produced by human activity? Before wagering vast wealth and curtailments of liberty on correcting the climate, two recent books should be considered.

In "The Third Horseman: Climate Change and the Great Famine of the 14th Century," William Rosen explains how Europe's "most widespread and destructive famine" was the result of "an almost incomprehensibly complicated mixture of climate, commerce, and conflict, four centuries in gestation." Early in that century, 10 percent of the population from the Atlantic to the Urals died, partly because of the effect of climate change on "the incredible amalgam of molecules that comprises a few inches of soil that produces the world's food."

In the Medieval Warm Period (MWP), from the end of the ninth century to the beginning of the 14th, the Northern Hemisphere was warmer than at any time in the past 8,000 years — for reasons concerning which there is no consensus. Warming increased the amount of arable land — there were vineyards in northern England — leading, Rosen says, to Europe's "first sustained population increase since the fall of the Roman Empire." The need for land on which to grow cereals drove deforestation. The MWP population explosion gave rise to towns, textile manufacturing and new wealthy classes.

Then, near the end of the MWP, came the severe winters of 1309-1312, when polar bears could walk from Greenland to Iceland on pack ice. In 1315 there was rain for perhaps 155 consecutive days, washing away topsoil. Upwards of half the arable land in much of Europe was gone; cannibalism arrived as parents ate children. Corpses hanging from gallows were devoured.

Historical evidence shows enormous fluctuations not produced by human activity.

Human behavior did not cause this climate change. Instead, climate warming caused behavioral change (10 million mouths to feed became 30 million). Then climate cooling caused social changes (rebelliousness and bellicosity) that amplified the consequences of climate, a pattern repeated four centuries later.

In "Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century," Geoffrey Parker, a history professor at Ohio State University, explains how a "fatal synergy" between climatological and political factors produced turmoil from Europe to China. What he calls "the placenta of the crisis" of that century included the Little Ice Age (LIA), between the 1640s and the 1690s. Unusual weather, protracted enough to qualify as a change in climate, correlated so strongly with political upheavals as to constitute causation.

Whatever caused the LIA — decreased sunspot activity and increased seismic activity were important factors — it caused, among other horrific things, "stunting" that, Parker says, "reduced the average height of those born in 1675, the 'year without a summer,' or during the years of cold and famine in the early 1690s, to only 63 inches: the lowest ever recorded."

In northerly latitudes, Parker says, each decline of 0.5 degrees Celsius in the mean summer temperature "decreases the number of days on which crops ripen by 10 percent, doubles the risk of a single harvest failure, and increases the risk of a double failure sixfold." For those farming at least 1,000 feet above sea level, this temperature decline "increases the chance of two consecutive failures a hundredfold."

The flight from abandoned farms to cities produced the "urban graveyard effect," crises of disease, nutrition, water, sanitation, housing, fire, crime, abortion, infanticide, marriages forgone and suicide. Given the ubiquity of desperation, it is not surprising that more wars took place during the 17th-century crisis "than in any other era before the Second World War."

By documenting the appalling consequences of two climate changes, Rosen and Parker validate wariness about behaviors that might cause changes. The last 12 of Parker's 712 pages of text deliver a scalding exhortation to be alarmed about what he considers preventable global warming. Neither book, however, supports those who believe human behavior is the sovereign or even primary disrupter of climate normality, whatever that might be. With the hands that today's climate Cassandras are not using to pat themselves on the back for their virtuous empiricism, they should pick up such books.

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