

## OP-ED

# Trapped in the endless fights of 2016

DOYLE McMANUS

**A**FTER STRONG showings in two special elections for congressional seats, Democrats are beginning to believe they have a real shot at winning control of the House of Representatives next year. But if they hope to succeed, they're going to have to stop fighting one another.

The first straw in the wind came in Kansas, where a virtually unknown Democrat came within a few percentage points of winning the House seat that Mike Pompeo, now President Trump's CIA director, won by 32 points only six months ago.

"That threw a scare into us," a top Republican strategist in Washington confessed. "Even in conservative districts, there's a backlash against Trump."

Even more tantalizing was last week's primary election in the suburban Atlanta district once held by Tom Price, Trump's secretary of Health and Human Services. A 30-year-old Democratic newbie named Jon Ossoff took 48% of the vote and almost won the seat outright. Now Ossoff faces a tough runoff in June against a well-funded Republican, Karen Handel, who wisely distanced

herself from Trump.

In a district owned by the GOP for the last 37 years, Ossoff rode a wave of anti-Trump enthusiasm and raised an astounding \$8 million from Democrats around the country. He had help from a long list of progressive groups, too, with one exception: Our Revolution, the political action committee founded by Bernie Sanders.

Why didn't Sanders pitch in for Ossoff? "He's not a progressive," the Vermont senator told the Washington Post.

By Sanders' yardstick, that's true. In a district Trump won narrowly in November, Ossoff ran as a generic moderate-to-liberal Democrat — a Hillary Clinton Democrat, in effect. A Sanders-style progressive, he wasn't.

But Sanders' brusque dismissal of the Democrats' hottest new face produced anguish even among some of his allies. "What was Bernie thinking?" a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus moaned to me. "That's going to make it harder for Ossoff to raise money for the runoff."

On Friday, Sanders relented. "It is imperative that Jon Ossoff be elected," he said in a written statement. "I applaud the energy and grassroots activism in Jon's campaign." But the episode revealed a problem for the Democrats: They

seem trapped in an endless loop of their bitter 2016 primary campaign.

The unresolved conflicts were on painful display last week when Sanders and the new chairman of the Democratic National Committee, former Clinton backer Tom Perez, attempted to stage a unity tour. The official theme was "Come Together/Fight Back," but togetherness was in short supply on the first few stops.

Perez was booed by Sanders supporters several times, even though he praised the Vermont senator lavishly and presented a policy message (drawn from Clinton's notably progressive platform) not too different from Our Revolution's. In return, Sanders delivered a reprise of his 2016 message, arguing that the party still doesn't get it. "The Democrats have not put forward an agenda that speaks to the needs of people in pain," he said.

Intraparty squabbles normally wouldn't matter much in a non-election year. But in addition to Georgia, House seats are up in Montana and South Carolina, conservative states where Democrats need to cast a broad net.

Their strength in the Kansas and Georgia contests have led many to believe that they have a better-than-expected chance to

## The Democrats' unresolved primary conflicts are on painful display.

gain 24 House seats in 2018, the number they need to gain a majority. "Georgia showed that the House is in play," Mark Mellman, a Democratic pollster and strategist, argued. "That was a huge turnout for a special election. Democrats are energized and mobilized."

Still, the House remains an uphill battle, in part because redistricting has made few seats susceptible to change. And Democrats have a chronic problem turning out voters in a non-presidential year. "Democrats underperformed the last two midterms by about 20%," warned Doug Sosnik, a former aide to President Clinton. "Can they change that? Maybe, but just opposing Donald Trump won't be enough."

In Georgia's 6th District race, for example, even though Ossoff came in first, he drew only a slightly larger percentage of the vote than Hillary Clinton did last year. DNC Chair Perez noted that

at least 30,000 Democrats failed to turn out in the special election. Ossoff would have won outright if 5,500 of them had shown up.

In other words, to win a majority in the House, Democrats will have to do everything right. Running Sanders progressives in every district is probably not one of those things. Democratic strategists have targeted 23 districts with Republican incumbents where Clinton won the presidential vote. Most of those seats are in the Sun Belt, seven in California alone.

Many of the up-for-grabs districts are not natural progressive territory, Mellman said. "The winning coalition in Georgia 6 is not a Bernie Sanders coalition," he said.

The Sanders-Perez not-ready-for-unity tour suggests that Democrats have a long way to go before the wounds of 2016 heal. Until then, Sanders and his supporters have decisions to make ahead of the 2018 congressional election: How progressive will they demand that Democratic candidates be? How tough a litmus test will they apply?

They hope to change the party and change control of Congress, too. The choice before them is: Which do they want to do first?

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# The high cost of the racial 'sleep gap'

By Benjamin Reiss

**W**HEN WE STUDY racial inequality, we tend to consider factors that affect people while they are awake. Differential access to safe neighborhoods with good schools, decent jobs and unbalanced treatment by police and the courts surely have much to do with the stubborn disparities in wealth and well-being among blacks and whites, in particular. Yet it may be just as important to consider what happens when we're asleep. Race shapes our sleep, a relationship that has surprising roots deep in our national past.

African Americans suffer from a "sleep gap": Fewer black people are able to sleep for the recommended six to nine nightly hours than any other ethnic group in the United States; compounding matters, a smaller percentage of African Americans' slumber is spent in "slow-wave sleep," the deepest and most restorative phase of sleep that produces the most benefits in healing and cognition. Poor sleep has cascading effects on racial health disparities, including increased risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

The racial sleep gap is largely a matter of unequal access to safe, reliable and comfortable sleep environments, and this sleeping inequality has a long history. For centuries, whites have tacitly accepted — and even actively created — such inequality. Aboard the ships of the transatlantic slave trade, African captives were made to sleep *en masse* in the hold, often while chained together. Once in the New World, enslaved people were usually still made to sleep in tight quarters, sometimes on the bare floor, and they struggled to snatch any sleep at all while chained together in the coffee. Slaveholders systematically disallowed privacy as they attempted round-the-clock surveillance, and enslaved women were especially susceptible at night to sexual assault from white men.

One might think that slaveholders, looking out for their bottom line, would be interested in ensuring at least a modicum of restful slumber for their enslaved workers. The social reformer Thomas Tryon made this argument in 1684 when he wrote of "inconsiderate masters" who compel the enslaved to work so hard that they were often so "overcome with weariness and want of proper Rest" that they would "fall into the fierce boiling Syrups" of the sugar pots. Ensuring proper rest, he wrote, "would add much to their Profit" as well as to the slaves' health.

Yet just as often, slaveholders justified overwork and minimal rest as a positive good, in the process elaborating curious theories about the supposed natural differences between the races.

Thomas Jefferson, for instance, opined that black people simply "require less sleep" than whites. And while he noted enslaved people's propensity to drop off quickly at the end of a long day, he convinced himself that a rapid descent into sleep was evidence of inferior intellects (rather than insufficient rest). White people, he observed, could keep themselves up late into the night to pursue intellectual or creative endeavors, whereas "negroes" were deficient in the powers of "reflection" that allowed them to do so: "An animal whose body is at rest, and who does not reflect, must be disposed to sleep of course."

Louisiana physician Samuel Cartwright, who conducted a widely disseminated study of the medical condition of slaves, also believed that differences in sleeping were evidence of the natural supremacy of the white race. He claimed that black people at rest instinctively smothered their own faces with blankets or clothing, impeding the flow of oxygen to the brain, and that this obstruction permanently stunted their intellectual development. As for slaves who wandered exhausted across the plantation, he considered this a special kind of black-people disease known as "*dysaesthesia aethiopica*." The cure, Cartwright

counseled, was "hard work in the open air" and increased discipline on the part of the slaveholders.

The killing labors, constant anxiety and wretched sleeping conditions of slavery no doubt produced chronic fatigue, and yet Jefferson and Cartwright perversely identified exhaustion as the problem and hard work as the cure. Such cures were often administered at the end of a whip. As Frederick Douglass put it in his memoir, "More slaves were whipped for oversleeping than for any other fault." Douglass went as far as to suggest that keeping the enslaved population in a state of constant fatigue was a useful tool in breaking their will. He wrote that, on Sundays, he regularly found himself "in a beast-like state, between sleep and wake" that made it impossible for him to act on the "flash of energetic freedom [that] would dart through [his] soul." Sinking back to the ground, he would simply mourn over his "wretched condition."

What remains of this history is a profound confusion as to the causes and effects of our racial inequalities. Out of Jefferson and Cartwright's pseudo-scientific racism, the stereotype of the "lazy black man" was given medical legitimacy: Exhaustion was seen as a character trait requiring more hard work, rather than an effect of a fractured sleeping environment and extreme physical and emotional duress.

To this day, opportunities for sound sleep are distributed unequally among the races, while the effects of such disparities are frequently misidentified. For example, minority students who perform poorly on tests, appear apathetic or act out in school are often blamed for lack of will or poor values, when in fact they may be irritable, depressed, or unfocused in large part because they're tired and stressed. An ongoing study by psychologist Tiffany Yip of Fordham University examines the joint effects of ethnic discrimination and sleep deprivation on African American and Latino youth; her preliminary findings suggest a vicious cycle in which experiences of discrimination lead to poor sleep, which in turn leads to higher levels of anxiety, lower engagement in school and deepening problems of self-esteem.

Some pediatricians, psychologists and public health advocates are beginning to understand that detection, prevention and treatment of poor sleep is an important aspect of improving the educational performance of socioeconomically disadvantaged children. Little public attention, however, is given to the more pervasive problem of unequal sleeping conditions that is borne of our troublesome racial history.

Slave quarters are now tourist attractions, but the descendants of enslaved Africans are still more likely than whites to live in inhospitable sleeping environments. As public health scholar Lauren Hale points out, African Americans tend to live in noisier and more dangerous urban environments than whites; such environments may lead to shorter and shallower sleep. African Americans are also more likely to have undesirable or unpredictable work schedules than whites, which leads to chaotic sleep schedules. Increased risk of hunger as well as fear of violence or harassment by police make a good night's sleep even harder to obtain.

Langston Hughes described American slavery as "the rock on which Freedom stumped its toe." As we attempt to address the inequities of wealth, education, health and incarceration that persist across the color line, we would do well to remember that these problems were formed by night as well as by day. If we want to close that gap, we'll have to confront Hughes' stubborn rock, which for too many serves in place of a pillow.

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Frederick Douglass

'More slaves were whipped for oversleeping than for any other fault.'

# Why aren't people listening to scientists?

It is up to experts to engage with the public by not just presenting but elucidating the evidence.

By Marcus du Sautoy

**W**HO WOULD YOU trust more: a politician or a scientist? Even in our age of skepticism, I think more people would vote for the scientist. And yet politicians who challenge well-tested scientific theories are getting unprecedented traction of late. The whole concept of the expert is under extraordinary attack on both sides of the Atlantic.

To be fair, science often goes against intuition. As kids, we build up models in our heads to explain the world around us. The Earth appears to be flat. The sun appears to go around the Earth. Humans appear to be very different from mice. Only a careful presentation of evidence counters these intuitive stories.

Take the mouse genome. It contains nearly the same amount of base pairs — the ladder rungs of the double helix — as the human genome, about 3.1 billion. Only 5% of these base pairs are responsible for coding the proteins that make us what we are. The other 95% are junk. Of the important stuff, 85% of human genes are, on average, identical to those of the mouse.

If you are still reading this, you have already experienced one of the problems with countering intuition: It takes time to lay out evidence, and the evidence can be complicated. Although you don't need a doctorate to understand the science, you do need time and a willingness to invest it in something other than the instantaneous news hits we've become accustomed to.

But even people who do put in the effort seem all too ready to dismiss scientific evidence. It's not that they don't believe the facts presented to them, exactly. It's that they question whether those facts are relevant to their own situation.

Why, for example, are people rejecting the idea that vaccines are essential to preventing the spread of disease? The science is pretty clear. Every virus has something called a "reproduction number," which represents the quantity of secondary infections produced by an infected individual in an unvaccinated population. Typically, influenza has a reproduction number of around two to three. Smallpox had a reproduction number of five to seven. Given the smallpox rate, epidemiologists predicted that inoculating 80% of the world population would successfully eradicate the virus. They were right.

We are currently experiencing a worrying growth in cases of measles. According to the World Health Organization, there were 134,200 measles deaths in 2015 — about 367 deaths every day, or 15 deaths every hour. We have a vaccine for measles. But because of its high reproduction number — 14 to 18 — measles will be eradicated only if we inoculate 95% of the population. A few irresponsible doctors have spread rumors that the measles, mumps and ru-

bella vaccine is linked to autism. Their original study, published in the *Lancet*, was rescinded and repudiated, and thousands of scientists have come out to explain why the rumors are not true. Yet the fear persists.

Our approach as a society to countering deadly diseases hinges on what is called "herd immunity." The concept requires us to think collectively, for the good of humanity, rather than individually. Think individually, and you might argue that there is a risk involved in taking any vaccine. But while there is a risk, it is often tiny. Herein lies one of the primary reasons for the dismissal of the expert, in my view: Rejectionists don't believe that the scientist has their best interests at heart.

Perhaps it is up to scientists to better understand this psychology and take it into account when we present our conclusions. But scientists don't always speak with one voice. Indeed, robust argument over the interpretation of data is a critical part of practicing science. Any new model must undergo questioning. This can be confusing to a public and government that want clear, definitive answers.

The public's desire for certainty presents one of the biggest challenges for the scientific community, since tension between the known and unknown animates much of what we do. We are sure that our model of the cosmos is correct, while at the same time recognizing that new revelations could require that we reconsider it. We grow confident in a theory if it is confirmed every time we test it, and yet, as the great philosopher of science Karl Popper pointed out, a theory is considered scientific only if it can be falsified — that is, if it has the potential to be challenged.

But while new evidence may reveal that a model is awry, such revelations do not throw all of science into question. The discovery of a new subatomic particle doesn't challenge our understanding of biology or gravity. That science is constantly improving does not mean it is always wrong.

Scientists could help bridge the gulf in understanding by engaging more with the public, particularly when it comes to research that will have a big impact on society. In fact, this should be part of our job descriptions. Not one-way lecturing, but a genuine exchange. We need to show our work, as a teacher of mine used to say — to not just present but elucidate the evidence for climate change, for evolution, for all of the scientific theories we have developed to explain our place in the universe. People don't want experts telling them how it is. They want to understand how we arrived at our conclusions.

This weekend, many scientists around the world gathered to take a stand against the attack on science. Though it feels good to march, protests signs alone won't convince. Only a sustained dialogue with the public will do that.

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