

Analysis

A ray of hope



Looking for a new team

UPI -- About eight decades ago, the great American humorist Will Rogers wryly observed that whenever Congress wanted to play a joke on its constituents, it passed a law. And more sarcastically, Rogers concluded that every law Congress passed was a joke.

Unfortunately, Rogers' dark humor applies to the state of domestic politics and even U.S. presidential elections.

In these elections, the winner says votes have consequences, meaning a "mandate" to govern. Except, given a divided government and the arcane rules of the U.S. Senate for a "super majority" to defeat a filibuster, a real mandate only works when one party controls all three houses of government and at least 60 votes in the Senate.

With the so-called fiscal cliff less than three weeks away and political posturing on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue overwhelming serious governing, this is turning into a very bad joke for Americans.

Taken more broadly, things aren't going well for the United States abroad either. This is no joking matter. The war and then the peace in Iraq have proven disastrous. Afghanistan's future depends on its ability to sustain its own security forces who are dependent on a long-term and robust presence of U.S. military might and money to provide the vital aviation, intelligence, logistics, advisory and fire support to overcome the persistent insurgency.

Egypt, Syria and swaths of Africa are wracked with violence and growing ungovernability. Europe remains mired in its financial and economic crises. And, yes, South and East Asia are rife with tension and many potential points of conflict.

This column has often referred to this kaleidoscope of roiling events as July 1914 in slow motion.

Interestingly, U.S. President Barack Obama has more latitude to deal with foreign policy matters than the looming fiscal cliff. The reason is painfully clear and the result of a very good idea of our founding fathers gone adrift.

A political system of divided government and checks and balances designed by the best minds of the 18th century presently seems unworkable in the 21st.

Gerrymandered voting districts and an evenly divided electorate mean that no one party will control government with a super majority to force legislation into law. Alas, going over the cliff, as painful as it will be and with repercussions that could induce a recession or worse, is perhaps the only way to reconcile the irreconcilable ideologies dividing Republicans and Democrats. To be

blunt, one party appears to have lost its mind, the other its soul. People can decide which is which.

But, as Obama fields his national security team, there is opportunity. The ideal candidate for secretary of state, if he were to take the position, is U.S. Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., with impeccable credentials including long service on and as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

While the president might prefer U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice, the issue here isn't the Benghazi brouhaha or any financial holdings she and her husband may have. Rice failed at convincing a number of senators of her suitability including moderate Republicans. Further, fellow U.N. representatives don't hold her in terribly high regard.

Since the fiscal and economic issues are far more important priorities for the nation, the president should husband his political capital and not risk a tough confirmation fight that would only delay getting a new team in place.

At defense, while there are many excellent candidates, former Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., should top that list. His experience in the private sector, two terms in the Senate, on the defense policy board and co-chairman of the president's intelligence advisory board and, most importantly, thoughtful understanding of national security are gold plated qualifications for the post. And, as a sergeant in Vietnam, Hagel was twice wounded in action and decorated for gallantry. That alone won't guarantee a good secretary but it certainly should impress members of the military from private to general.

Should this happen, four (not three) former senators will have the reins for the nation's security: Messer's Obama, Vice President Joe Biden and Senators Kerry and Hagel.

The issue is whether the president fully appreciates the complexity, volatility and potential for crises the current international environment poses. Former and soon to be former secretaries Robert Gates and Leon Panetta at defense and former Sen. Hillary Clinton at state provided a strong team. But an even stronger team is needed.

The world need not be defined by the pessimism of Hobbes or the naivete of Voltaire's Professor Pangloss. While the political process of governing may indeed be Rogers' idea of a bad joke gone wrong, a ray of hope can break through this gloomy picture. While hope is never a strategy, Obama does have an opportunity if he chooses to exercise it.

By HARLAN ULLMAN

Science

'Fossil' raindrops clues to early Earth

UPI -- The fossilized imprints of raindrops in 2.7 billion-year-old rocks reveal clues to what the atmosphere was like on the early Earth, a U.S. researcher says.

The depth of the depressions in what was once volcanic ash suggest how fast the raindrops were traveling when they hit the ground, which in turn gives scientists information on how dense the atmosphere was almost 3 billion years ago.

The Earth was a difference place than what is seen today, scientists have said; it rotated more slowly on its axis, the moon appeared huge in the sky because it was much closer, sunlight was much weaker and the atmosphere was unable to support life.

The fossil raindrops suggest the atmosphere 2.7 billion years ago was likely about as dense as today, perhaps a bit less, researcher Sanjoy Som from NASA's Ames Research Center in California told the BBC.

That supports the idea the ancient atmosphere must have had a strong concentration of greenhouse gases.

"There was probably quite a bit of nitrogen in the atmosphere, like today, but there was no oxygen," he said.

Without extra density in the atmosphere to trap heat, only the presence of greenhouse gases would provide a blanket to keep heat in and keep the Earth from turning into a snowball planet under a substantially weaker sun, he said.

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Dane DeHaan

Amazing Spider-Man 2 Casts Harry Osborn: Is Dane DeHaan Hotter Than James Franco? <http://eonli.net/SHWFS2>



Kourtney Kardashian

Kourtney Kardashian & Mason are cuties at the beach! [PHOTO:http://eonli.net/YsjEqj](http://eonli.net/YsjEqj)



Kate Middleton

Kate Middleton winks engagements in wake of #royalbaby news and hospitalization <http://eonli.net/YrZ21B>



Rihanna

Rihanna puts some fancy clothes on, looks great! [PHOTO:http://eonli.net/UbK0Te](http://eonli.net/UbK0Te)



Justin Bieber

It's another date night for Justin Bieber & Selena Gomez! This time with hand-holding! <http://eonli.net/QcRLMF>



Kristen Stewart

After killing it on the Breaking Dawn tour, Kristen Stewart had to go and wear this awful skirt?! [PHOTO: http://eonli.net/QCm8xU](http://eonli.net/QCm8xU)



Ariel Winter

Ariel Winter's Ongoing Mom Drama: "I Just Want the Best for Her," Says Modern Family [Costar http://eonli.net/R3oYNW](http://eonli.net/R3oYNW)

Space

NASA'S MARS ROVER FINDS TRACES OF CARBON

(Reuters) - NASA's Mars rover Curiosity, dispatched to look for the chemical ingredients and environments for microbial life, has found hints of carbon, though whether this building block for life on Earth has played a similar role on Mars is unknown, scientists said on Monday.

"Just finding carbon somewhere doesn't mean that it has anything to do with life, or the finding of a habitable environment," lead scientist John Grotzinger, with the California Institute of Technology, told reporters at the American Geophysical Union conference in San Francisco.

"If you have organic carbon and you don't have any water, you don't have a habitable environment," he said.

Even with carbon and water, life needs other chemicals, such as sulfur, oxygen, phosphorous and nitrogen, to form and evolve.

"It's not unexpected that this sand pile would not be rich in organics. It's been exposed to the harsh Martian environment," added



Curiosity scoop marks on Mars

planetary scientist Paul Mahaffy, with NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland.

"It's really going to be an exciting hunt over the course of this mission to find early environments that might be protected from this surface Mars environment and see what we can add to the carbon story," Mahaffy said.

The rover, which in August touched down on the floor of a 93-mile wide (150-km) impact crater near the Martian equator, has already turned up evidence that its landing site was once covered in water.

Scientists do not know

if the carbon compounds in the soil are contamination from Earth, arrived on the surface of Mars via comets or asteroids, or, if they are indigenous, whether they came from geological or biological activities on Mars.

The rover is expected to reach a richer slice of Martian history next year when it begins examining layers of sediment in a mountain rising from the floor of the crater. "We're hoping to find the spices that make a stew tasty. There are the basic ingredients that you expect to be there, but it's how you combine them and the minor ingredients that really turn out to be interesting," he said.

"What this mission is about is integrated science," Grotzinger added. "There is not going to be one single moment where we all stand up and on the basis of a single measurement have a hallelujah moment."

The \$2 billion Curiosity mission, which is due to last two years, is NASA's first astrobiology mission since the 1970s Viking probes.

Friends



Orazio Martino poses with his 23-year-old Mississippi alligator Blacky in his private a basin at his house in Dietzenbach, center Germany. (AFP)

Nature

EARLIEST KNOWN DINOSAUR DISCOVERED

(Reuters) - Researchers have found what could be the earliest known dinosaur to walk the Earth lurking in the corridors of London's Natural History Museum.

A mysterious fossil specimen that has been in the museum's collection for decades has now been identified as most likely coming from a dinosaur that lived about 245 million years ago - 10 to 15 million years earlier than any previously discovered examples.

The creature was about the size of a Labrador dog and has been named *Nyasasaurus parringtoni* after southern Africa's Lake Nyasa, today called Lake Malawi, and Cambridge University's Rex Parrington, who collected the specimen at a site near the lake in the 1930s. The London fossil was studied by researchers in the 1950s but no conclusion was reached and nothing was published, said Barrett. "It was a mystery what it was ... It just became this mythical animal."

Two features of the London fossil, together with a similar sample subsequently spotted at the Iziko South African Museum in Cape Town, are strong evidence that the animal belongs with



20-60 kg. When it was alive, the world's continents were joined in a vast landmass called Pangaea, and the area of Tanzania where the fossils were found would have been part of the southern Pangaea that included Africa, South America, Antarctica and Australia.

Theorists have long argued there should have been dinosaurs walking the Earth in the Middle Triassic period, which ended about 237 million years ago, but until now the evidence has been ambiguous, said Sterling Nesbitt at the University of Washington in Seattle who led the study, published in the journal *Biology Letters*.

"If the newly named *Nyasasaurus parringtoni* is not the earliest dinosaur, then it is the closest relative found so far," said Nesbitt.

"What's really neat about this specimen is that it has a lot of history. Found in the '30s, first described in the 1950s ... Now 80 years later, we're putting it all together."

The researchers plan further field work in Tanzania to find more fossils and build a better picture of the animal's anatomy.

the dinosaurs, the researchers said.

The bone tissues in the upper arm show marks of rapid growth, common in dinosaurs, and they also have a feature known as an elongated deltopectoral crest that anchored the upper arm muscles, a feature unique to dinosaurs.

"Although we only know *Nyasasaurus* from fossil fragments, the anatomy of its upper arm bone and hips have features that are unique to dinosaurs, making us confident that we're dealing with an animal very close to dinosaur origin," said Barrett.

The researchers believe *Nyasasaurus* probably stood upright, was a meter tall at the hip, 2-3 meters long from head to tail, and weighed