

are providing a good product at some risk. And like all capitalists who take personal risks to serve the public, they deserve medals. We could make them out of the martyred Corvair. •

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## Feminist Ideal Flouts Science on Pregnancy

By Suzanne Fields

Obstacles to adopting babies are much in the news, and there's another sad story lurking behind the headlines. It's about parents who can't have children.

Biological and physiological obstructions prevent many women from conceiving the greatest desire of their heart, but researchers and physicians are beginning to whisper about a dilemma that runs counter to current intellectual fashion and feminist persuasion — the downside to delaying pregnancy. A woman's infertility, chances for miscarriages and rising risks for breast cancer are, whether we like it or not, linked to age.

"We are sort of caught in a time when women are getting acclimated to education and careers and delaying their families, and now it seems to be coming back to hurt them," Mary Daly, a medical oncologist and epidemiologist at the Fox Chase Cancer Center, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* for a front-page story on the medical consequences of deferred pregnancies.

Ma Nature wasn't prepared for the sexual revolution, the pill or even modern feminism. It's not news that fertility declines with age, but new statistics may be a fire bell in the night about what ages we're talking about.

Only 12 percent of childless women between the ages of 25 and 34 have problems having babies, but 21 percent between the ages of 35 and 44 do, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. These numbers run



counter to cultural messages.

For the past two decades, young mothers, along with Rodney Dangerfield, have been getting no respect. The cultural message is to wait until you are secure professionally before you have a baby — as though pursuing a career after having children is a bad choice. (You can't prove it by me.)

The emphasis for television's Murphy Brown, who had a baby out of wedlock, was not whether she could get pregnant, but that she would get pregnant, as her biological clock ticked toward 40. Television anchorwoman Connie Chung announced plans on camera to try to get pregnant when she was in her 40s.

"In reality, only a few percent of women over 40 are truly fertile, meaning they have the capacity to become pregnant and deliver a baby," says Mark Sauer, a fertility specialist in California who works with menopausal women who want to get pregnant with the eggs of younger women. "From strictly a reproductive point of view, you really should be trying to have your babies when you're younger."

A woman of 25 is twice as likely as one of 35 to have a healthy baby. A

woman between 20 and 31 has a 74 percent chance of conceiving in a year. Chances decrease to 54 percent for women over 31. (The number of eggs and even the robustness of eggs decline significantly after 35.)

That doesn't mean these women won't eventually get pregnant. Many will. But it may take them longer, and the extended anguish can be awful. One woman who wanted to get pregnant for several years told me how she cried every day and looked at every pregnant woman as a personal punishment.

Some feminists, many of whom have no children by choice, regard even talking about this as a backlash against feminism. But they're backpedaling themselves, contemptuous of a woman's right to make her own tough choices based on accurate information.

Risks for high blood pressure and diabetes and even breast cancer may rise with late pregnancies (though breast cancer is complicated by other factors, including genetic history). A woman of 25 has only a 1-in-1,250 chance of having a baby with Down's syndrome. At 40, her chances are 1-in-106.

Feminists often talk as if they think life with children, for middle-class young women in their 20s, is a dead end rather than an open-ended reward, despite stories of successful working women who stayed home, worked part-time or continued their education when their children were young. Increasing numbers of women postpone childbirth for all kinds of reasons, including late marriage, and that can be wise.

But their decisions should be informed by the latest research, no matter how disturbing or unfair. Crying “backlash” is only a lash to punish women. ●

*Suzanne Fields, a columnist for the Washington Times, is nationally syndicated*

## Gridlocked Government Badly in Need of Evolution

By Richard Grenier

Lord Beloff, one of Britain's greatest living historians, thinks of the United States as a nation that has “repudiated history.” By this he means we have little historical sense, knowing neither where we came from, where we’re going, nor even, in some cases, where we are today.

The Democratic Party is a stunning example of this. Democratic leaders — whose thinking is fashionably elitist — have seemingly quite forgotten the party’s populist roots. The gulf of deceit now separating the party’s leadership from ordinary Democratic voters is a source of perennial astonishment to me. And I’ll never have clearer proof of this than the list of members of Congress who tried desperately to keep their names secret while deliberately preventing a key bill by GOP Rep. James F. Inhofe of Oklahoma from coming before the House of Representatives for a vote. With a single exception, all 222 of these se-

cretive lawmakers are Democrats.

Inhofe’s bill was designed to prevent the practice of “bottling up in committee” legislation popular with the American people but unpopular with the congressional elite. He proposed breaking up this double shuffle reminiscent of a crooked blackjack dealer by making public what has been the most mysterious secret in Washington: the names of representatives who refuse to sign a “discharge petition,” thereby preventing a bill from getting to the floor of the House.

Apply simple common sense. What possible reason could a representative have for wanting to keep it a secret that he opposed putting a bill to a vote? There’s a rather disgusting reason — he has been grandstanding and harumphing around the country claiming to support a bill, when in fact he doesn’t want the bill passed at all. There are even cases of House members who sponsor bills they don’t want passed. This, you will admit, is hypocrisy on a truly impressive scale.

In keeping Inhofe’s bill bottled up but their names secret, all the big Democratic players were there: Tom Foley, Dick Gephardt, David Bonior, Dan Rostenkowski, Lee Hamilton, David Obey, Pat Schroeder. From idealistic Massachusetts: Barney Frank, Ed Markey, Joe Kennedy. From economically depressed California: Tom Lantos, Robert Matsui, Nancy Pelosi, Vic Fazio, Don Edwards. From the Black Caucus: Kweisi Mfume, Charlie Rangel, Ron Dellums and that tribune of the people, Maxine Waters. Plus Robert Torricelli, Charles Schumer and 200 other Democrats less known but naturally including, both last and least, Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky.

Most Americans don’t have the faintest idea what a discharge petition is. They’ve heard of bills being bottled up in committee, but don’t realize that forcing a bill onto the floor for a vote requires a petition signed by an absolute majority of House members. Above all, almost no one knows that a petition of this sort is guarded like the code for the “black box.” It’s kept in a locked drawer in the House clerk’s desk. Only signatories are allowed to see it — but they’re not allowed to take notes or even to carry a pencil when reading it. Violators face disciplinary action up to and including expulsion.

Inhofe has just blown the whole racket. Before the summer recess, he

introduced a bill requiring signers and nonsigners of discharge petitions to be made public. And when his bill was predictably assigned to the Rules Committee to be deep-sixed, he defied the House and has now published the names of those refusing to sign *his* discharge petition.

Americans often think that because their country is in many ways the envy of the world, their government is also. It is not. Congress’s cumbersome, unwieldy “committee system” that has evolved over the past half-century or so is imitated by no one. And our political institutions (the elite controlling the Democratic Party is a prime example) are often far from reflecting the popular will.

Lord Beloff contrasts the United States with France, a much more consciously political country whose political institutions, he observes, “mutate” far more rapidly. Political parties rise and fall, change their names, and often disappear. The Radical Socialist Party of Georges Clemenceau is no more. The current Socialist Party was formed about 20 years ago and zoomed to unchallenged power in the early 1980s, only to be cut to pieces in this spring’s elections. France’s environmental movement, which the *New York Times* predicted on the eve of the elections would become the country’s second most powerful force, won not a single seat. When the French change their minds on a political issue, change can be swift. In Britain also, David Lloyd George’s once-powerful Liberal Party barely survives.

Since the Civil War, the United States has been slogging along with the same two parties. Democrats and Republicans change now and then, of course, but compared with European parties they are somewhat amorphous groupings. And there’s often a substantial ideological discrepancy between a party’s leaders and many of its voters — as the clandestine behavior of Democratic representatives concerning discharge petitions clearly suggests.

It’s a national peculiarity in America that, for regional, ethnic or sometimes religious reasons, citizens fall into the habit of voting for a certain party and have a tendency — although economic or political issues are certainly not without effect — to support it loyally as if it were a baseball team.

Given the opinions of a lot of De-