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The Politics of Snow

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The politics of snow

‘Snowpocalypse’ isn’t an act of god; it’s a combination of anti-tax southerners and a changing climate, says **Michael I. Niman**

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We Buffalonians can’t help reveling in amusement watching disoriented Mid-Atlantic cities struggle under a beautiful, fluffy blanket of snow. It started early this winter with a Washington, DC police officer pulling a gun at a snowball fight – not really clear on the concept. As the winter progressed, Bulb-tanned newscasters took to terming incidents of blowing, drifting snow as “blizzards,” but then the snow gods tossed them a curveball in the form of real, albeit mild, blizzards. Escalating their habitually panicked rhetoric, East Coast media wonks came up with terms like “snowmageddon” and “snowpocalypse” to describe their snowstorms.

Those of us living in the half of the continent that takes snowstorms in stride are always mildly amused at the paralysis suffered by cities like Washington, DC every time they get two inches of snow. Give them two feet and they get downright silly, hoarding toilet paper and shutting schools for weeks on end – hunkering down, presumably, with houses full of defecating children. One Whole Foods Market had to close its doors and limit entry to small groups in order to protect itself from a panicked mob and a possible Black Friday style trampling, presumably in the toiletries isle.

Slow to come up with their own work-

ing definitions for the new Mid-Atlantic terminologies for snowstorms, linguists have passed the ball to the wiki nation, with the online Urban Dictionary defining “snowpocalypse” as “When weathermen [sic] predict large amounts of snowfall in a short period of time.” The dictionary goes on to clarify: “In cases of a Snowpocalypse it is really the panicked reaction of said citizens and NOT the actual snow that makes the situation worthy of the title.”

On-air freakout

One case in point would be the on-air freakout of Baltimore AccuWeather forecaster Jim Kosek, who predicted a “paralyzing, crippling, record-breaking storm,” replete with “blowing and drifting” snow. In Kosek’s defense, I think we were seeing a stab at humor – from a weather forecaster.

The competing term, “snowmageddon,” according to most media reports, is the brainchild of President Obama, who, like Kosek, doesn’t normally do much standup comedy. While it’s nice to see a jovial president, you’ve got to be a little concerned with heads of state using any word ending in “-mageddon,” though I was always more concerned when the last guy used the term.

The best comedy, however tragic, is coming from the climate-change deniers, who like their teabagger and birther cous-

ins, always prove a more embarrassing representation of America than our throngs of toilet paper hoarders ever could. As best as I can follow the logic in their seven second arguments, they go like this: “I’m cold today, so global warming can’t be real, so let’s take the Escalade for a joyride.”

Of course climatologists have been predicting this moment for 20-plus years, with global warming altering weather patterns and causing hotter and colder extremes on a warming planet. But hey, who listens to Democrap-girly-egghead god-hating liberal science-loving scientists? So what if the winter Olympics get rained out. The Braves and the Orioles get rained out all the time and you don’t see us whining.

Back on earth, there are other political issues surrounding snow as well. We in Buffalo, like our neighbors in Cleveland, Syracuse, Rochester and Chicago, can deal with it, because we pay taxes to support the socialism of snow plowing. It’s not like snow, even in the snow-paralyzed Mid-Atlantic, is an entirely unforeseen event. Hell, images of Washington, DC slushed to a standstill grace our newscasts annually. It regularly snows in western North Carolina and Virginia. Even Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and northern Florida get sporadic frosts.

Stuck in the snow

The story here is that when the few snowplows in the region took to the streets, many of them either got stuck or broke down. Furthermore, when the snow got heavy, many municipalities pulled their inexperienced plow operators off the roads.

Had they bought better plows, or regularly sent their operators to snow country for training, perhaps they’d have been better prepared for the task of keeping their roads clear.

This is a political decision, and in the anti-tax South, you don’t let creeping socialism get the better of you. Why spend money on education, healthcare, and snowplowing when you can instead leave it in the hands of the undertaxed rich – snowed into their McMansions.

Snow doesn’t faze us much in upstate New York because our infrastructure is built for it. Our roads are poured a bit thicker, our highway shoulders are a bit wider, each one of our cities begins each winter with enough salt to salt every pretzel in the world for generations, and we own a fleet of snow-clearing machines that are beefier than some of the Humvees the Bush administration initially sent to war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

All of this costs money, and we’ve made a decision to put our winter survival and mobility above our own anti-taxation greed. The result of this is that we can go to work, our kids can go to school, and sick folks can make it to the doctor. We’ll even go skiing if we feel like it.

Snowpocalypse isn’t an “act of god.” It’s a social disease. It’s the collision of a changing political climate and a changing geo-climate. It’s gonna snow. Get used to it and buy some damn shovels. **CT**

Dr. Michael I. Niman is a professor of journalism and media studies at Buffalo State College, New York.

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