How to Defeat the Fear Industry

By Alex Berezow, PhD — August 9, 2017

Living in Seattle, food phobias are everywhere. If you're afraid of conventionally grown fruits and vegetables, GMOs, hormones in meat, pesticides, gluten, or anything that requires a PhD scientist to produce, then Seattle is your organic Mecca. Despite that Seattle's economy is partially built on the biotech sector (not to mention that the much-loved University of Washington has an enormous biomedical science program -- of which yours truly is a graduate), Seattle is a global headquarters of kooky food fads and alternative medicine.

Why? The entire "natural is better" movement is predicated upon fear. Scaring people is a time-tested tactic employed by politicians. If a politician wants elderly people to vote for him, he will tell them that his opponent will take away their Social Security and push them off a cliff. If he wants to shore up the national security vote, he will say that his opponent will let terrorists into the country. And if he wants to appeal to youth, he will say that his opponent wants to steal their futures and prevent them from getting good jobs.

Of course, the solution is very simple and always the same: Give the politician your money (and your vote), and he will make sure that none of those evil things will ever happen. Very little changes, and two/four years later, the cycle repeats.

Politically savvy people laugh at this strategy, wondering what sort of boobs could fall for it. Look in the mirror. The belief that "if the other person wins, we're all doomed" is pervasive on social media and in our political discourse. Increasingly, Americans believe that the other party is trying to destroy the country. This is the fruit of our fearmongering labors.
Don't think that others haven't noticed. Dishonest companies that want to sell you something are perfectly happy to do so by scaring you senseless.

**Fear: Why the "Natural Is Better" Myth Persists**

Our culture has become accustomed to regular assaults on chemicals or anything artificial. Chemistry and biotechnology -- instead of being hailed as the revolutionary sciences that they are -- have been mocked by an organic industry that is now worth $47 billion [2]. The PR from companies like Whole Foods [3] and Panera Bread [4] is consistent: Other stores' food is toxic and dangerous, and only our food is safe. The message works. In 2015, Whole Foods brought in more revenue than Monsanto [5].

The insanity doesn't end there. Alternative medicine practitioners teach people to be afraid of their doctors. Lawyers instill fear about pharmaceutical companies. Financial gurus want us to be afraid of banks. Big Pharma, Big Ag, Big Business, Big Finance, Big Government -- they're all out to get us. As usual, the only solution is to give the fearmonger your money. After all, a fearmonger's got to make a living, too.

Making people afraid to live in their own homes, work in their own cities, and eat their own food is an obscenely profitable business. However, we can destroy the Fear Industry by tuning them out. The reality is simple: In the developed world, you have very little to fear. We live our lives in good health and safety, and much of that is attributable to the wonderful advances of science and technology.

So, next time somebody tries to scare you with talk of "Big ____," you should respond, "Big Deal."

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