Money makes decisions Sanity never would. Fear, too. This adage applies to an awful lot of things, most of them pretty awful -- like politics and Ebola. These are awful and also awe-filled, but not in a good way. The critical difference between politics and Ebola? It's possible to somewhat survive devastating, ignorant decisions by the country in politics, even Bush-league decisions. Ebola, on the other hand, starts at death, and goes downhill from there.

Both are bad systems, way out of control. Both operate in a wide range, anywhere from figuratively to literally lethal. Both score lower than body lice in approval ratings. Both clog up your TVs and radios. Plus, there are more similarities at fighting the two than you might first think.

Tell you what I mean: In my part of the world, when 19 snowflakes, by actual count, have hit the sidewalk around a local TV broadcast studio, an official Snow Emergency is declared, and live, round-the-clock coverage begins. The TV station's graphics department is alerted, and, inside of the time it takes to track and catch one snowflake in your mouth, a new, screen-blasting piece of artwork is created for broadcast, as a backdrop for the usual dizzy and ditzy, *On the Spot, Eyewitness Action News-You-Can-Use, Eye-in-the-Sky* anchor team.

Invariably, the graphic is muted and demure, modestly trumpeting out something like ***Snow Apocalypse Trauma Center Update Action Desk***
or something similarly boneheaded and jarring, sporting gigantic fonts touched up with icicle appendages for that chilling, but cutesy,
You Are There
feeling for the news anchor set.

Behind the scenes, as they are scrambling to get the character generator fired up and hail the Message Crawler Crew back from the tavern across the street, the crack marketing team is warming up in the playpen for a flurry of *Snow Emergency* calls to area businesses.

Their flaky pitches, of course, are all about the sudden bonus round of nearly endless local advertising time now available, falling like frosty manna from heaven, now that the station has dumped all network programming in order to run *Snow Apocalypse* coverage until further notice.

This is all done in the public interest, naturally. *Sure.*

Money drives this parade of snowy showboating, and there is absolutely no reason to expect sanity to be part of the equation. Owing to the windfall nature of *Winter Armageddon* coverage at the local level, there is every reason to scramble the multi-million-dollar news truck fleet, purchased for just such an eventuality, and start coverage at the first sniff of snow in the air, the first wink of a flake floating toward terra firma, terra incognita, No Man's Land, or wherever else remote crews can possibly set up.

(This usually means thrilling, exciting, heart-palpitating, edge-of-your-seat, live images beamed via satellite and microwave relays from vacant parking lots and 24-hour gas stations and truck stops. Yawn.)

Money being in the equation, and not sanity, means there is every reason to assume coverage will continue for as long as possible -- until July Fourth, ideally, when there can be *additional* local breakaways, and commercials, interrupting
Ice Hammer Blizzard Devastation
coverage for festive fireworks footage.

Even better? We all watch this foolishness, commercials included -- and they know we will. The TV stations milk us, and the situation, like herds of mindless cows, chewing our cud, and our cheese puffs, while looking through the back of the TV set.

Maybe we watch for actual news, checking local conditions, getting an update on weather forecasts. Sometimes, we watch, once things really get going, to chuckle and smirk at hubris-filled morons with SUVs getting acquainted with their limited driving skills -- skills that are not automatically upgraded, as they had previously thought, with their SUV purchases.

Sometimes we watch to have our faith surprisingly renewed in humanity, that strangers really *do*
help each other in a time of
Storm of the Century Snow-Pocalypse,

getting cars unstuck and untangled, helping each other up off the slick deck, and what-not.

And the commercials fell like stinging sleet and hail in our eyes, and the local TV coffers were heaped higher than snowbanks, while marketing people and station owners dreamed of sugarplums a-plenty, bundled high in their brand new sleighs, pulled by their trusty new steeds, Beamer and Mercedes and Jaguar and ....

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Which -- *sorry about the whiplash* -- brings us to **Ebola.**

We could use a little of that continuing coverage, public-interest sentiment right now -- but, this time, without the howler-monkey hype, without the spin-dizzy graphics, without the manic vocal manifestations, without the over-caffeinated facial expressions, and without the million-dollar remote news trucks scrambled to broadcast live from the corner of Empty and Street.

If at all possible, too, we could also do without the usually-dictated spot load of 40 minutes of commercials every hour, to start.

Operating in the public interest is part of the requirement of a broadcast license in order to use public airwaves. Normally, that requirement is treated as an unenforceable, fine-print distraction to owning a combination bank, lottery headquarters, and currency mint like a TV station.

I'm thinking we could all use regular, ongoing demonstrations of stations and networks actually *acting*
in the public interest -- not merely saying that they will or they do, holding up evidence of their public spirit by running Public Service Announcements at 3 a.m. for Gout Awareness Week, The Tattoo Remorse Foundation, or National Hangnail Month.

Only a constant stream of information -- real, solid, scientific information -- disperses panic and

paranoia. Confused, contradictory information only hikes up the heebie-jeebies index to nosebleed heights. Confused, contradictory activity from scientists and public officials and politicians is also negative help, and of the worst kind.

So far, media has done just about everything in its power to either confuse the issue, muddy the waters, and spook people into frenzied, eye-popping jitters. This is unhelpful pandering at its worst -- staying on the air, beating the drum of fear, keeping the public permanently off balance and ill-informed, while running commercials at five times the number and twenty times the price, for those of us huddled around the TV in our surgical masks and hazmat suits.

Now, I realize this sort of thing is Standard Operating Procedure at Fox News, for example, aka Dupe Central, where audience IQ units routinely clock in at room temperature on a cold winter day in New England, in a home with no heat, no walls, and no roof.

I simply hope we and our media can be better than that, better than the factual obfuscations and random reality fantasizing and manufacture that is the Fox trademark norm.

Examples: I have heard that one cannot contract Ebola from an infected object -- then heard of one confirmed case in which a person got Ebola from a blanket. I have heard one cannot possibly catch Ebola from surfaces, then saw demonstrations of wiping down surface areas using alcohol wipes -- and then heard, too, just how long Ebola can survive on various surfaces, biding its time.

How long? I've personally heard one month. No -- wait, make that *two* months. Or is it weeks? *Hang on, hang on* --
this just in:
definitely
at least 3 weeks, maybe more, researchers say, and then, in the next breath, are quoted at saying anywhere from one to three months.
For the moment -- but all bids are probably not yet in. Do I hear six months? A year?

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I have also heard and read in media reports that one *absolutely cannot get* Ebola from someone showing *no* symptoms of the disease -- except that I have *also* read and heard in media reports that one *can positively contract* Ebola from those with the disease, even when the symptoms are ***not*** present.

Posi-lutely and abso-tively.

I have also followed reports and committee hearings and interviews and I have discovered health officials appear to be mostly doing the right things, except when they are definitely not doing the right things. With some overlap, conflict, and margin of error -- except when they are *100% dead-on.*

Perhaps that is not the best expression to use in summing up these reports.

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If political campaigns and our political system were run like Ebola information releases, we'd...

Scratch that. Come to think of it, our political system and political campaigns ARE being run like releases of Ebola information: We're not quite being treated like the proverbial mushrooms, by being kept in the dark and fed waste products, but pretty close.

Same feeding frenzy, though. Same appetite for more. Same willingness to settle for less.

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When it comes to Ebola, I am not in favor of involuntary quarantine camps with guard towers, razor wire, and patrolling teams of zombie wolves, even if this would make one hell of a Halloween movie in which to cash in on the season, the headlines, and squeeze even more coins out of the stunned, confused crowds.

(Full disclosure: I am not now, nor have I ever been, a zombie wolf -- nor have my family or friends, nor do I have any leisure, business, or other ties to anyone who may be inclined to self-identify in this way. To my knowledge.)

However, I have read today that a nurse, back from a tour helping Ebola victims overseas, and after a few symptom-free days, has decided her freedom is being unjustly and unscientifically encroached upon by the possibility of a quarantine, and threatens legal action if she is compelled to give up any of her Constitutional rights to move around as she sees fit.

Some random facts: The nurse is now symptom-free after a few days of watchful concern. I have seen and heard in reports and hearings that Ebola takes up to 21 days to develop observable symptoms. I have seen and heard in reports and hearings that one ***cannot possibly*** pass on Ebola when showing no symptoms -- except when one ***actually does*** pass along Ebola, ***whether showing symptoms or not.***

Always good to clear up confusing situations, isn't it. While I am absolutely glad the nurse was able to help Ebola victims, and amazed at her bravery and possible sacrifice, I am positively stunned at her rejection, as a member of a scientific profession such as medicine, of scientific information currently available, however contradictory it may be or actually is. Or maybe I am not stunned. I'll have to get back to you on that one, as soon as our leaders and our media get back to me.

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It occurs to me right now that this would be a *fabulous* time to show off and display some observable signs of our so-called American Exceptionalism, get our scientific facts right, and then repeatedly communicate them in the media, clearly and without hidden agendas or hopes for enrichment, fear-mongering, or other bean-counting, pin-headed excuses.

This educational project and task of the country, and of electronic broadcast media, would be called *operating in the public interest.* In my little universe, where logic is more than an optional accessory or idle, passing fancy, our country would be capable of discerning what the actual scientific facts are, and then our media would be additionally capable of communicating these facts to one and all -- over and over, with updated information, until everyone is completely, fully, and 100% aware of the facts.

.... even fractional-information, Fox News viewers and insane, right-wing politicians and media hosts -- which is to say, *all* of them.

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There has been much demand for radio and TV advertising time in the run-up to the November elections. Part of this brutal attack on your consciousness by political ads -- almost always scathingly, scaldingly negative -- is the radioactive payback from so many years of special-interest-fed decisions that have kept the political campaign loot pouring in from all sources, without restriction or tracking or monitoring. PACs and war chests are nearly bottomless, whereas the amount of advertising time available is finite, even if media companies were to simply run political ads 60 minutes out of every hour.

(Here's hoping I have not given radio and TV station political greed any ideas, nor rooted on Ebola in our equal medical ignorance, either.)

Time magazine reports one TV station in Des Moines, Iowa, that added an extra hour to its nightly newscast, to take advantage of the freely flowing firehose of campaign advertising monies gushing forth like broken hydrants, and *still* had demand outstripping available ad time.

Of course, we could simply bend to Republican will, and allow direct purchase of political office by the highest bidders, and allow Nature to sort out those who have natural immunity to Ebola and those who may / might / maybe do not.

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BTW: If I hear one more ignorant Republican use *Democrat* as an adjective -- like saying *Dem ocrat*
Party, or
Democrat
idea -- then each and every one of them will be a
Republica or Republic
from that day forward.

According to research, now that the last moderate Republican from the Eisenhower Administration has given up and gone over to the dark side, to Fox and Rush, there are no sane Republicans left, and a new line of embarkation must be sadly, but firmly, drawn.

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As far as broadcasters helping the nation come up to speed on Ebola: If there is push-back from broadcasters in airing these multiple, daily, extended-period educational announcements, commercial-free, let us as a Nation invoke the fine print in the operating licenses of the private money mills called broadcast outlets, and nationalize them for the duration of the perceived emergency and actual paranoia -- and help stem a pandemic, and a stampede, in the making.

You know -- if *that* works, and people become better informed about the scientific situation via sane TV broadcasts, armed as they would then be with real, actual, and authentic facts, we should pay attention to this success.

For me, in my tiny universe of logic, it is a small step to get the root of all evil -- *money* -- out of politics as well, and return
sanity
to our political process, too, by insisting that broadcasters and print media provide a small percentage of their air time and ad space to political candidates, and at no cost to those who run, as a cost of doing business in the public interest, on the public airwaves and in the country at all.

Perhaps we could also junk all these absurd legal rulings about endless PAC contributions by secret parties being fine, that corporations are really people, and that the one with the most money should be able to buy their way into office via combative ads assaulting opponents...

Deep pockets raise only deep concerns, not deeply inspiring, deeply knowledgeable, or deeply efficient candidates.

In my universe, local and national governments would grant every political candidate a set amount of funds, according to office level and type, with candidates free to spend those equally-granted funds as they see fit -- and may the best candidate win.

It would be interesting to see the ***wisest user*** of funds elected, rather than the person who could simply ***heap up the most cash***.

With free air time and free ad space -- a set amount to each candidate, because fair is fair, now -- candidates would not need to make campaign contributions move from $400 million to $2.6 billion, as they have, from 1984 to 2012, up 555%, according to the November 3rd issue of *Tim e.*

In this system, it would be a case of ***may be the best message win -***- not simply be the case where the message wins which beats you into a pulp as you encounter it 4,367 times each day, pumped from mysterious, slush-fund war chests to your sorely ringing ears.

If we get strapped for cash, pass a one-tenth of a penny tax -- even a hundreth of a penny tax --

on every single Wall Street transaction, without exception, and feed those trillions into the Treasury to offset Ebola and political program costs, and to help offset the trillions in taxes that corporations and the wealthy avoid paying by moving their funds off shore and incorporating a sliver of themselves overseas to magically become tax-free.

Both Ebola and politics -- and our entire country -- can benefit from the same fixes to get each moved from the uneducated, paralyzing, deadly, and the unknown, and back into the Land of the Living, and the Land of the Sane.

I *dunno* about you, but if we don't fix both these broken systems, and our country at large, we're all facing armageddon here of multiple kinds -- and not just the ad-hungry, scrambled newsmobile, Winter-Wonderland kind.

... but the kind that'll make both me and you swallow hard and holler, *Armageddon outta here!*

I have no stake in Time *magazine, but the November 3rd issue also has a decent summary section on Ebola, in addition to highlighting the rocketing absurdity of campaign finance.*

Today's Bonus: Here is a little levity to help draw back from Ebola and politics a bit, and from the *Precipice of Eternal Horror* -- what TV would likely call any program over 30 seconds in length having accurate scientific facts and no adrenalin-pumping music, no horrifying graphics, and a without a hyperventilating approach.

Things Cats Do That'd Be Creepy If You Did Them:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUANIvNmYzQ