

DIGITAL CANARIES—PRIVACY AND WATER

BY

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Particularly in America, there is a founding myth of free-wheeling, unregulated capitalist democracy being a critical underpinning of (commercial) growth, societal success, and all that's good in the world. The idea, brandished aggressively by those to whom its benefits accrue most, is that anything that would inhibit or regulate that free wheeling is by definition bad. The Right, aka Republicans, are most associated with this position, and evidence of its sway is in the current broad-based dismantling of regulatory regimes throughout America during 2017. It is lauded by the noisy class, which successfully whips up other spheres of society to support the position as well. The question is: is it good or even sensible?

Two recent stories are a good place to start. Their headlines are: "[Dangerously Low on Water, Cape Town Now Faces 'Day Zero'](#)," in the [New York Times](#), and "[Security Breaches Don't Affect Stock Price](#)," found at Bruce Schneier's blog, [Schneier on Security](#).

The first story is about how Cape Town, South Africa will likely run out of water in April. That this situation implicates global climate change is not the point. Nor should we blow it off because it's just some "sh*thole" country. Cape Town is a canary in a well-lit

coal mine: the same has been going on in California and other parts of the world for decades. Cape Town is merely the first to reach the end of the line.

Much more important is that Cape Town reached this point despite ongoing pleas to conserve water. When their *Day Zero*—when the well runs dry—arrives though, access to the maritally protected water will be much harsher for everyone. From the [Globe and Mail](#):

"We have reached a point of no return," Cape Town Mayor Patricia de Lille told a press briefing on Thursday.... "Despite our urging for months, 60 per cent of Capetonians are callously using more than 87 litres per day. It is quite unbelievable that a majority of people do not seem to care and are sending all of us headlong towards Day Zero."

The second story, from eminent cybersecurity guru, Bruce Schneier, reports on a December 2016 paper from Georgetown University's Russell Lange and Eric Burger entitled, "[Long-term implications of data breaches, not](#)." The high-level finding is that six-months after a data breach exposing personal information of customers and others, breached businesses' stock prices appear to be not meaningfully affected on average. The implication is that the market's holistic check on companies not protecting your data is... fantasy.

What these two articles expose, in two clearly distinct domains with clearly distinct actors involved, is that the old saw about the unregulated market providing the back-stop to protect citizens (from themselves) and provide all that's good does not hold. At the very least it is insufficient without the help of regulatory or legislative penalties.

We're mostly OK with water and food regulation, and in some way OK with regulating immigration. Economics, however, seems to trump protecting natural wilderness and continental shelves, never mind being free from the threat of random

death by assault weapon. Without some regulation on them, expect untrammelled, powerful interests to continue to use our pathological, individual self-interest as leverage while stealing and carving up your present American Dream. If we don't die of thirst, the classes that will control the future through weakened net neutrality, irresponsible personal and data protection, privacy, and other dangers of the digital age will steal your children's digital future.

Listen carefully and you'll hear the canaries going silent. Watch and you'll see them fall. Remember, you're next.

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