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OpinionCommentary

David McGrath: The innovations I'd like to see deep-sixed in 2026



Kansas City Chiefs fans do the “tomahawk chop” as their team plays the San Francisco 49ers in Super Bowl LVIII during the Red Kingdom Block Party on Feb. 11, 2024, in Kansas City, Missouri. (Reed Hoffmann/Getty)

By [David McGrath](#)

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A number of innovations in American history that initially seemed like good ideas turned out to be disasters.

One notorious example is Ohio toolmaker Ermal Fraze's invention of the pull-tab aluminum can, popular in the 1960s after he returned from a Sunday picnic where no one in his family remembered to bring a can opener.

But his easy-open cans unleashed a scourge of millions of the small, sharp-edged aluminum tabs. They were found everywhere — on sidewalks, streets, river bottoms, parks and Lake Michigan beaches. Not to mention the deadly danger when well-intentioned drinkers, rather than tossing the tops, dropped them into the can of soda or beer, only to later end up in the hospital emergency room after swallowing what was akin to a razor blade.

Thankfully, Chicagoan Daniel F. Cudzik came to the rescue with his invention of the “stay-on” tab for beverage cans, mercifully ending a decade of one of our more glaring health and environmental disasters.

Which is why, as the new year begins, we should resolve to rescue the country from the following bad ideas:

The tomahawk chop. America is well aware of the gesturing by 76,416 Kansas City Chiefs fans dressed in red all pretending to scalp their opponents with an invisible tomahawk, in a historically twisted Hollywood stereotype offensive to Native Americans, while they hum the theme song from the 1950s cartoon show “Pow Wow the Indian Boy,” which was written by a white man for the amusement of children. [The chop](#) and chant are embarrassing and wrong in so many ways, not the least of which is that this very public mortification exacerbates Native American youths’ sense of confused identity, poor self-esteem, invisibility and community isolation, while increasing their already epidemic rates of depression and suicide. The Hunt family that owns the Chiefs can stop endangering Native American lives while also sparing audiences from this assault to our eyes and ears by manning up and changing the team’s name, just as the Washington Commanders did.

Coincidentally and unfortunately for the Chiefs, they were eliminated from playoff contention. The silver lining, however, is that Native Americans will get a reprieve.

Drywall: Every time a town in America is flooded — a daily occurrence in the past several years — victims have 48 hours to tear down their interior walls and stack the drywall outside to avoid serious respiratory consequences from mold that would otherwise spread inside their home.

The heavy 4-by-8-foot sheets, also known as wallboard, sheetrock, gypsum or plasterboard, have been a cheap and ubiquitous wall covering for nearly a century. They are a major health hazard and a lousy building material that I cannot hammer, file, drill or saw without the likelihood of it tearing, cracking and giving off dust.

An executive order that would actually benefit the country would be to outlaw drywall and require builders to substitute brick, concrete or composite panels that are both waterproof and fireproof. Anything but sheetrock!

Magazines that are unreadable: Though I am a fan of the rugged adventures and ultra sports featured in a certain outdoors magazine (which is why I'm not naming it), reading it has become more torturous than some of the endurance competitions it covers. The multicolored pages feature white text and microscopic fonts, particularly those used in captions, which require a magnifying glass for anyone older than 40. Add glossy fashion magazines to

the disposal pile, the ones in which I must hunt for the story I want amid a dense forest of advertisements in a maze of unnumbered pages.

Restaurants where I cannot converse: Technically, I am permitted to talk at these echo chambers, but no one will hear me. Not even my wife, Marianne, sitting across the table. It's understandable if the building is also a historical architectural gem with outdated acoustics. But anything built or remodeled in the last 30 years where you must strain to hear family or friends speak, while you're a prisoner of the stultifying monologue of someone seemingly shouting on the other side of the room, must be rehabbed or razed. Socialization is the second biggest reason we go out to eat, and we have sadly had to cross dozens of otherwise well-meaning establishments off our list where chatting is an onerous challenge.

Auto start-stop in cars: I used to be an excellent, safe driver, coming to a full stop at every stop sign. But now I proceed in a “rolling stop” through most of them in order to make sure that my car engine does not shut down because of the auto stop-start feature that turns it off when I brake. I know, I know, it is supposed to save a sip of gas in city traffic. But for me, it is as annoying as shutting the TV off and on at every commercial break. Especially in the heat of summer when the car’s air conditioning stops or dwindles along with the engine. My blood pressure was already high enough before I bought this damned car!

Commercials that repeat. Who doesn't enjoy those funny TV commercials from insurance companies such as Geico, Aflac or Progressive? But when I see the same commercial six times while watching a Sunday football game, such as the Aflac ad featuring coach Nick Saban and "Neon" Deion Sanders, I feel like wringing the neck of the Aflac duck, even though it's the best actor of the three. Enough is enough, especially with the advances of artificial intelligence these days, which could conceivably churn out a hundred variations of a 30-second spot so that I would never have to see the same one twice.

Finally, and with apologies to the late Andy Rooney (the greatest of all curmudgeons), happy New Year, everyone!

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