

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



STEPHEN A. FORRESTER, *Editor & Publisher*

LAURA SELLERS, *Managing Editor*

BETTY SMITH, *Advertising Manager*

CARL EARL, *Systems Manager*

JOHN D. BRUIJN, *Production Manager*

DEBRA BLOOM, *Business Manager*

SAMANTHA MCLAREN, *Circulation Manager*

## Port of Astoria gets a do-over

*Despite bad experience, waterfront hotel site is one of the best*

The Port of Astoria has a burden in its lease to Brad Smithart, who operates the Astoria Riverwalk Inn — the remade Red Lion Inn. Smithart owes some 18 months of lease payments to the Port. He also owes overdue room tax money to the city of Astoria.

It appears that Smithart wants to sell his lease to another operator. But the Port Commission must agree to that transfer.

The essence of the choice Port commissioners made in giving Smithart the lease on the former Red Lion property is that they passed up a professional hospitality firm — Escape Lodging — in favor of an inexperienced, untried operator. Headquartered in Cannon Beach, Escape Lodging operates the Ocean View Lodge and other hotel properties on the coast and in Eastern Oregon.

The key element of the Escape Lodging proposal was demolition of the Red Lion

property. It is understandable that the Port did not want to make that cash outlay. But demolishing the decrepit motel and starting over is the only way to go. Putting money into a waterfront property that is falling apart is a losing proposition.

While Astoria has been enjoying an explosion of quality hotel projects — Cannery Pier, Elliott, Hampton Inn, Holiday Inn — the Port is sitting on one of the best hotel sites in town.

Port Commissioners and staff will have an opportunity to make a choice that would make Astorians proud. In the parlance of sports, the Port will soon have a do-over.

## Time to restore natural balance

*Cormorants are overrunning lower Columbia salmon population*

They are cool dinosaur descendants. But we don't need so many of them.

It's comparatively easy to learn what is killing young salmon on their migration to the ocean, but it has proven exceptionally difficult to do much about it. So it is for double-crested cormorants on East Sand Island near Chinook, Wash., where a bird colony eats about 11 million juvenile salmon and steelhead each year. By one calculation, this resulted in 740,000 fewer returning adult salmon between 2010 and 2013.

This issue is the opposite of a mystery. The great-great-grandfathers of today's fishermen were concerned about the same problem more than a century ago. Back then, the drastic solution was to kill everything that competed with humans for salmon, to the extent that fish-eating birds and sea mammals were drastically cut back.

Most modern residents understand the desirability of a diverse ecosystem. We want all creatures to prosper. This includes cormorants.

It's hard to look at a hummingbird and believe it is a descendant of dinosaurs, but cormorants look as though they could be direct survivors from the Jurassic period. With close-cropped black feathers and a sort of hunched-shoulders demeanor, when they spread their wings to dry while perched on pilings, it's easy to see their inner-pterodactyl.

Society is spending a vast sum on salmon recovery. At some point — and that point is now — it is time to rebalance the equation toward making sure that fewer of these expensive young salmon end up as bird food for an avian species that is obviously doing quite well in this region.

"Avian predation upon Columbia River salmon stocks has grown to become the single-largest, unchecked impact on their sustainability. ... After more than a decade of research, we can no longer afford to study cormorant impacts without addressing their threats to salmon recovery," said Paul Lumley, executive director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission in Portland.

No one better understands the need for long-term balance than the river's treaty tribes. We should listen to them.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is proposing to kill 11,000 adult cormorants on the island. Along with other steps, including making sure some eggs don't hatch, this will bring the colony into better alignment with modern realities.

None of the rationality of wildlife management measures such as these will keep the most avid environmental groups from suing to try to block them. But mature and responsible stewardship often requires assisting nature in maintaining the right balance. That is what should happen here.

## Brian Williams' ticking time bomb

By MAUREEN DOWD  
*New York Times News Service*

WASHINGTON — This was a bomb that had been ticking for a while.

NBC executives were warned a year ago that Brian Williams was constantly inflating his biography. They were flummoxed over why the leading network anchor felt that he needed Hemingwayesque, bullets-whizzing-by flourishes to puff himself up, sometimes to the point where it was a joke in the news division.

But the caustic media big shots who once roamed the land were gone, and "there was no one around to pull his chain when he got too over-the-top," as one *NBC News* reporter put it.

It seemed pathological because Williams already had the premier job, so why engage in résumé inflation? And you don't get those jobs because of your derring-do.

When Williams was declared the hair apparent to Tom Brokaw in 1995, hailed by Jay Leno as "NBC's stud muffin," I did a column wondering why TV news programs only hired pretty white male clones. I asked Williams if he was an anchor android.

"Not that I'm aware of," he said gamely, in his anchor-desk baritone. "I can deny the existence of a factory in the American Midwest that puts out people like me."

Williams told friends last week that he felt anguished, coming under fire for his false story of coming under fire.

Although the NBC anchor had repeated the Iraq war tall tale, ever more baroquely, for more than a decade, when he cited it on his Jan. 30 broadcast during a segment about going to a Rangers game with a retired, decorated soldier who had been on the ground that day when he landed, Williams got smacked down on Facebook.

A crew member from a Chinook flying ahead of Williams, who was involved in the 2003 firefight, posted, "Sorry dude, I don't remember you being on my aircraft. I do remember you walking up about an hour after we had landed to ask me what had hap-



Maureen Dowd



Photo by Evan Agostini/Invision/AP  
Actress Allison Williams poses with her father NBC News anchor Brian Williams at HBO's "Girls" fourth season premiere party at The American Museum of Natural History Jan. 5 in New York.

*Frothy morning shows long ago became the more important anchoring real estate.*

pened." *Stars and Stripes* ran with it.

Social media — the genre that helped make the TV evening news irrelevant by showing us that we don't need someone to tell us every night what happened that day — was gutting the institution further.

Although Williams' determination to wrap himself in others' valor is indefensible, it seems almost redundant to gnaw on his bones, given the fact that the Internet has already taken down a much larger target: the long-ingrained automatic impulse to turn on the TV when news happens.

Although there was much chatter about the "revered" anchor and the "moral authority" of the networks, does anyone really feel that way anymore? Frothy morning shows long ago became the more important anchoring real estate, garnering more revenue and subsidizing the news division. One anchor exerted moral authority once and that was Walter Cronkite, because he risked his career to go on TV and tell the truth about the fact that we were losing the Vietnam War.

But TV news now is rife with cat, dog and baby videos, weather stories and narcissism. And

even that fare caused trouble for Williams when he reported on a video of a pig saving a baby goat, admitting "We have no way of knowing if it's real," and then later had to explain that it wasn't. The nightly news anchors are not figures of authority. They're part of the entertainment, branding and cross-promotion business.

Former *ABC News* anchor Diane Sawyer trended on Facebook for reportedly scoring the first interview about Bruce Jenner's gender odyssey.

When current ABC News anchor David Muir was still a correspondent, some *NBC News* reporters had a drinking game about how many times he put himself in the shot and how many times his shirt was unbuttoned.

As the late-night comic anchors got more pointed and edgy with the news, the real anchors mimicked YouTube.

Williams did a piece on his daughter Allison's casting in an NBC production of *Peter Pan*. And Muir aired an Access Hollywood-style segment with Bradley Cooper.

As the performers — Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, John Oliver and Bill Maher — were doing more serious stuff, the supposedly serious guys were doing more performing. The anchors pack their Hermès ties and tight T-shirts and fly off to hot spots for the performance aspect, because the exotic and dangerous backdrops confer the romance of Hemingway covering the Spanish Civil War.

Oliver, who has made waves with pieces on financial chicanery in the Miss America contest and the corporate players trying to undermine net neutrality, told *The Verge* that he is hiring more researchers with backgrounds in investigative journalism.

Meanwhile, in an interview with Fusion, Muir acted out the facial expressions he uses during his broadcast: "the listening face," the "really listening" face, and the "really concerned" face. All that was missing was "Blue Steel."

With no pushback from the brass at NBC, Williams has spent years fervently "courting celebrity," as *The Hollywood Reporter* put it, guest starring on *30 Rock*, slow-jamming the news with Jimmy Fallon and regaling David Letterman with his faux heroics: "Two of our four helicopters were hit by ground fire, including the one I was in, RPG and AK-47."

As his profession shrinks and softens, Williams felt compelled to try to steal the kind of glory that can only be earned the hard way.

## Nobody understands how debt works

By PAUL KRUGMAN  
*New York Times News Service*

Many economists, including Janet Yellen, view global economic troubles since 2008 largely as a story about "deleveraging" — a simultaneous attempt by debtors almost everywhere to reduce their liabilities.

Why is deleveraging a problem?

Because my spending is your income, and your spending is my income, so if everyone slashes spending at the same time, incomes go down around the world.

Or as Yellen put it in 2009, "Precautions that may be smart for individuals and firms — and indeed essential to return the economy to a normal state — nevertheless magnify the distress of the economy as a whole."

So how much progress have we made in returning the economy to that "normal state"? None at all. You see, policymakers have been basing their actions on a false view of what debt is all about, and their attempts to reduce the problem have actually made it worse.

First, the facts: Last week, the McKinsey Global Institute issued a report titled "Debt and (Not Much) Deleveraging," which found, basically, that no nation has reduced its ratio of total debt to GDP. Household debt is down in some countries, especially in the United States. But it's up in others, and even where there has been significant private deleveraging, government debt has risen by more than private debt has fallen.

You might think our failure to reduce debt ratios shows that we aren't trying hard enough — that families and

governments haven't been making a serious effort to tighten their belts, and that what the world needs is, yes, more austerity. But we have, in fact, had unprecedented austerity. As the International Monetary Fund has pointed out, real government spending excluding interest has fallen across wealthy nations — there have been deep cuts by the troubled debtors of Southern Europe, but there have also been cuts in countries, like Germany and the United States, that can borrow at some of the lowest interest rates in history.

All this austerity has, however, only made things worse — and predictably so, because demands that everyone tighten their belts were based on a misunderstanding of the role debt plays in the economy.

You can see that misunderstanding at work every time someone rails against deficits with slogans like "Stop stealing from our kids." It sounds right, if you don't think about it: Families who run up debts make themselves poorer, so isn't that true when we look at overall national debt?

No, it isn't. An indebted family owes money to other people; the world economy as a whole owes money to itself. And while it's true that countries can borrow from other countries, America has actually been borrowing less from abroad since 2008 than it did before, and Europe is a net lender to the rest of the world.

Because debt is money we owe to ourselves, it does not directly make the economy poorer (and paying it off doesn't make us richer). True, debt can pose a threat to financial stability — but the situation is not improved if efforts to reduce debt end up pushing the economy into deflation and depression.



Paul Krugman

Which brings us to current events, for there is a direct connection between the overall failure to deleverage and the emerging political crisis in Europe.

European leaders completely bought into the notion that the economic crisis was brought on by too much spending, by nations living beyond their means. The way forward, Chancellor Angela Merkel

of Germany insisted, was a return to frugality. Europe, she declared, should emulate the famously thrifty Swabian housewife.

This was a prescription for slow-motion disaster. European debtors did, in fact, need to tighten their belts — but the austerity they were actually forced to impose was incredibly savage. Meanwhile, Germany and other core economies — which needed to spend more, to offset belt-tightening in the periphery — also tried to spend less. The result was to create an environment in which reducing debt ratios was impossible: Real growth slowed to a crawl, inflation fell to almost nothing and outright deflation has taken hold in the worst-hit nations.

Suffering voters put up with this policy disaster for a remarkably long time, believing in the promises of the elite that they would soon see their sacrifices rewarded. But as the pain went on and on, with no visible progress, radicalization was inevitable. Anyone surprised by the left's victory in Greece, or the surge of anti-establishment forces in Spain, hasn't been paying attention.

Nobody knows what happens next, although bookmakers are now giving better than even odds that Greece will exit the euro. Maybe the damage would stop there, but I don't believe it — a Greek exit is all too likely to threaten the whole currency project. And if the euro does fail, here's what should be written on its tombstone: "Died of a bad analogy."

*All this austerity has, however, only made things worse.*