

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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Purchased pols betray principles

“The rich get richer and the poor get poorer” isn’t in the U.S. Constitution, but too many members of Congress are acting like it is.

As reported Tuesday by the *Seattle Times*, the U.S. House voted this week to gut a law that tries to protect mobile-home buyers from predatory sales tactics and high-interest loans. Also Tuesday, the U.S. House Rules Committee took up H.R.1105, which will give a \$269 billion, 10-year tax cut to the 5,500 wealthiest households in the country.

The *Times* and the Center for Public Integrity have done a super job documenting some of the abuses heaped on purchasers of mobile homes, some of the most vulnerable home buyers in the country. There certainly are responsible and ethical sellers and lenders serving this market. But industry leader Clayton Homes, part of Berkshire Hathaway, an investment conglomerate run by billionaire Warren Buffett, lends at unusually high rates that doom many buyers to a cycle of insurmountable debt and repossession.

The 2010 Dodd-Frank Act instituted steps like independent preloan counseling to keep borrowers from making mistakes — such as being misled into thinking they can quickly refinance unaffordable trailer loans to lower rates. Tuesday’s action by the House would scrap this, for example, by letting salespeople double as loan counselors, and easing the interest-rate threshold at which greater protections kick in.

Unsurprisingly, the Republican committee chairman who shepherded this through was the single larg-

est 2014 recipient of campaign contributions from Clayton employees. In our area, U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, D-Ore., voted against gutting protections; U.S. Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler, R-Wash., voted to scrap them.

President Obama has promised to veto the measure if it also passes in the U.S. Senate. He certainly should do so.

Meanwhile moving ahead to cut taxes on America’s wealthiest individuals and families, House Republicans planned a Wednesday vote to eliminate the last bits of the federal estate tax, which only applies to estates larger than \$5.4 million. If this effort succeeds, the 318 richest estates each year — worth \$50 million or more — will save an average of \$20 million each that would otherwise go to help balancing the books in the nation that helped make them rich in the first place.

As noted by *Washington Post* writer Dana Milbank, “This is the ultimate perversion of the tea party movement, which began as a populist revolt in 2009 but has since been hijacked by wealthy and corporate interests. The estate tax has been part of American law in some form since 1797, according to the advocacy group Americans for Tax Fairness, a shield against the sort of permanent aristocracy our founders fought to rid themselves of.”

In Will Rogers’ immortal words, it’s obviously still true “America has the best politicians money can buy.”

CEDR should look at child care links

The link between day care and the economy is obvious

In any economy, child care is essential. In rural Oregon that is especially so. For working couples, finding day care can be a make-or-break proposition.

Edward Stratton’s Wednesday article illustrated the high demand for child care in Clatsop County, as well as a number of start-ups that give families hope. But overall, demand for child care considerably outpaces supply.

One of the biggest developments in child care was the Astoria City Council’s 2011 decision to have the city Parks and Recreation Department manage the child care center at Gray School. It is known as Little Sprouts, and 50 to 60

children use it per day.

In its enlightened initiative, then-Mayor Willis Van Dusen and Astoria city councilors saw the link between child care the local economy. Without day care, two working parents can’t work. Little Sprouts, as well as Port of Play in the same building, have become two of the city’s major amenities for young families moving here.

Organizations such as Clatsop Economic Development Resources (CEDR) would do well to look at the link between child care and our economic development. That connection is real. A new, larger initiative could make a difference.

We invented our own event, and it lasted

A newspaper in a small town and a rural county is asked to contribute to a broad array of causes. It is a treat to create something ourselves and contribute to that.

Twenty-seven years ago, we approached track coaches at Astoria and Seaside high schools with the concept of an invitational track meet. The idea would be to invite small high schools, as well as the large, and perhaps even a school from outside the county.

The track coaches liked the idea and *The Daily Astorian* Invitational Track Meet was born. Through sun,

wind and rain, it has become a fixture of the spring athletic schedule. This year’s meet will begin at 10 a.m. Saturday at Astoria High School.

Unlike sports such as baseball, football, basketball, soccer and volleyball, the emphasis in track and field is on individual performance as opposed to the team’s point count. That is especially what we highlight at the Daily A Invitational. In fact, the coaches name outstanding girl and boy athletes in running and field events.

You will be delighted with what you see. If the past is a guide, there will be memorable performances.

The lost language of privacy

By DAVID BROOKS
New York Times News Service

Like a lot of people, I’ve come to believe that it would be a good idea to put body-mounted cameras on police officers. I now believe this for several reasons.

First, there have been too many cases in which police officers have abused their authority and then covered it up.

Second, it seems probable that cops would be less likely to abuse their authority if they were being tracked.

Third, human memory is an unreliable faculty. We might be able to reduce the number of wrongful convictions and acquittals if we have cameras recording more events.

I’ve come to this conclusion, but I haven’t come to it happily. And, as the debate over cop-cams has unfolded, I’ve been surprised by how many people don’t see the downside to this policy. Most people don’t even seem to recognize the damage these cameras will do both to police-civilian relations and to privacy. As the debate has unfolded, it’s become clear that more and more people have lost even the language of privacy and an understanding of why privacy is important.

Let’s start with the basics. Privacy is important to the development of full individuals because there has to be an interior zone within each person that other people don’t see. There has to be a zone where half-formed thoughts and delicate emotions can grow and evolve, without being exposed to

the harsh glare of public judgment. There has to be a place where you can be free to develop ideas and convictions away from the pressure to conform. There has to be a spot where you are only yourself and can define yourself.

Privacy is important to families and friendships because there has to be a zone where you can be fully known. There has to be a private space where you can share your doubts and secrets and expose your weaknesses with the expectation that you will still be loved and forgiven and supported.

Privacy is important for communities because there has to be a space where people with common affiliations can develop bonds of affection and trust. There has to be a boundary between us and them. Within that boundary, you look out for each other; you rally to support each other; you cut each other some slack; you share fierce common loyalties.

Cop-cams strike a blow for truth, but they strike a blow against relationships.

All these concentric circles of privacy depend on some level of shrouding. They depend on some level of secrecy and awareness of the distinction between the inner privileged space and the outer exposed space. They depend on the understanding that what happens between us stays between us.

Cop-cams chip away at that. The cameras will undermine communal bonds. Putting a camera on someone is a sign that you don’t trust him or that he doesn’t trust you. When a police officer is wearing a camera, the contact between an officer and a civilian is less likely to be like intimate friendship and more likely to be oppositional and transac-



David Brooks

Putting a camera on an officer means she is less likely to cut you some slack, less likely to not write that ticket, or to bend the regulations a little as a sign of mutual care.

Putting a camera on the police officer means that authority resides less in the wisdom and integrity of the officer and more in the videotape. During a trial, if a crime isn’t captured on the tape, it will be presumed to never have happened.

Cop-cams will insult families. It’s worth pointing out that less than 20 percent of police calls involve felonies, and less than 1 percent of police-citizen contacts involve police use of force. Most of the time cops are mediating disputes, helping those in distress, dealing with the mentally ill or going into some home where someone is having a meltdown. When a police officer comes into your home wearing a camera, he’s trampling on the privacy that makes a home a home. He’s recording people on what could be the worst day of their lives and inhibiting their ability to lean on the officer for care and support.

Cop-cams insult individual dignity because the embarrassing things recorded by them will inevitably get swapped around. The videos of the naked crime victim, the berserk drunk, the screaming maniac will inevitably get posted online — as they are already. With each leak, culture gets a little coarser. The rules designed to keep the videos out of public view will inevitably be eroded and bent.

So, yes, on balance, cop-cams are a good idea. But, as a journalist, I can tell you that when I put a notebook or a camera between me and my subjects, I am creating distance between me and them. Cop-cams strike a blow for truth, but they strike a blow against relationships. Society will be more open and transparent but less humane and trusting.

My father’s secret for a winning life

By FRANK BRUNI
New York Times News Service

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — Dad had a twinkle in his eye.

“Wait until you see this trick,” he told me. “This secret. You’re guaranteed to make money. I’ll show you when we sit down at a table.”

A blackjack table, he meant. Dad loves blackjack, especially with my three siblings and me, and we’ll circle a casino floor for an hour just to find a dealer with enough empty seats for three or four or all five of us, so that we can have our own little cabal.

He inducted us into the game decades ago, in Vegas, and we continued to play over the years, because it was another excuse and another way to spend time together: our ritual, our refuge.

Before last weekend, we hadn’t played in a long while. But for his 80th birthday, he got to choose the agenda for a weekend out of town. He picked blackjack. And he picked Atlantic City, because it was closer than Vegas and good enough.

It’s funny how modest his desires can be, given what a grand life he’s lived. He’s the American dream incarnate, all pluck and luck and ferociously hard work and sweetly savored payoff.

He grew up outside New York City, the oldest child of relatively poor immigrants from southern Italy. English was his second language.

He managed to be elected president of his high school over the blond quarterback from the right side of

the tracks, then won a full scholarship to college. But first he had to persuade his parents that four years in New Hampshire at a place called Dartmouth could be as beneficial as an apprenticeship in a trade.

He married a grade-school sweetheart and stayed married to her through business school, a sequence of better jobs and a succession of bigger homes until she died at 61, just months shy of his retirement and of what were supposed to be their golden years. He eventually learned how to work the dishwasher, but never how to go more than a few minutes without pining for her.

It’s the phase of his life since my mother that I find most compelling, because it’s a tribute to what people are capable of on the inside, not the outside.

They can open up, soften up and step up. When Mom was around, my father’s assigned role in the family was as the stern disciplinarian — he played the warden, so that Mom could be our friend — and he was never forced to notice our hurts or attend to them, to provide succor and counsel in matters of the heart.

Then he had to, because he was the only parent left. He held my sister’s hand through her divorce. He made sure to tell me and my partner that our place in the family was the same as any other couple’s.

And his nine grandchildren, only two of whom my mother lived to meet, came to know him as their most fervent and forgiving cheer-



Frank Bruni

leader, ever vigilant, ever indulgent. Their birthdays are the sturdiest part of his memory. He never fails to send a gift.

A generous man from the start, he has somehow grown even more generous still, not just with items of measurable value but with those of immeasurable worth, like his time. His gestures. His emotions.

He has figured out what makes him happiest, and it’s doing the little bit that he can to nudge the people he loves toward their own contentment. It’s letting us know how much he wants us to get there. It’s being obvious about all of that and, in the process, bringing a smile to our lips, a twinkle to our eyes.

Here’s what happened, on this milestone birthday of his, when we finally found the right blackjack table and fanned out around him and it was time for his trick:

He asked each of us — his kids, our life mates — to stretch out a hand. And into every palm he pressed two crisp hundred-dollar bills, so that our initial bets would be on him and we would start out ahead of the game.

“See?” he said. “You’re already a winner.”

That was it — his secret for blackjack, which is really his secret for life, and has nothing, obviously, to do with the money, which we’re blessed enough not to need too keenly and he’s blessed enough not to miss too badly.

It has to do with his eagerness, in this late stage of life, to make sure that we understand our primacy in his thoughts and his jubilation in our presence. It has to do with his expansiveness.

I pray I learn from his secret. I hope to steal it.

Where to write

• **U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D):** 2338 Rayburn HOB, Washington, D.C., 20515. Phone: 202-225-0855. Fax: 202-225-9497. District office: 12725 SW Millikan Way, Suite 220, Beaverton, OR 97005. Phone: 503-326-2901. Fax 503-326-5066. Web: bonamici.house.gov/
 • **U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D):** 313 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-3753. Web: www.merkley.senate.gov
 • **State Rep. Brad Witt (D):** State Capitol, 900 Court Street N.E.,

H-373, Salem, OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1431. Web: www.leg.state.or.us/witt/ Email: rep.bradwitt@state.or.us

• **State Rep. Deborah Boone (D):** 900 Court St. N.E., H-481, Salem, OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1432. Email: rep.deborah.boone@state.or.us District office: P.O. Box 928, Cannon Beach, OR 97110. Phone: 503-986-1432. Web: www.leg.state.or.us/boone/
 • **State Sen. Betsy Johnson (D):** State Capitol, 900 Court St. N.E., S-314, Salem, OR 97301. Telephone:

503-986-1716. Email: sen.betsy.johnson@state.or.us Web: www.betsyjohnson.com District Office: P.O. Box R, Scappoose, OR 97056. Phone: 503-543-4046. Fax: 503-543-5296. Astoria office phone: 503-338-1280.

• **Port of Astoria:** Executive Director, 10 Pier 1 Suite 308, Astoria, OR 97103. Phone: 503-741-3300. Email: admin@portofastoria.com

• **Clatsop County Board of Commissioners:** c/o County Manager, 800 Exchange St., Suite 410, Astoria, OR 97103. Phone: 503-325-1000.