

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*
 HEATHER RAMSDELL, *Circulation Manager*

Not that long ago ...

Oregon tore its guts out thrice over homosexuality

When change comes swiftly, we tend to forget what preceded it. Last Friday's momentous Supreme Court decision on the rights of homosexuals to marry obscures a relatively recent moment in Oregon's public life.

Not that long ago a man who was politely called a "conservative social activist" promoted ballot measures that were designed to punish homosexuals. The leader of the Oregon Citizens Alliance, Lon Mabon, authored Measure 9 in 1992 and Measure 13 in 1994. In 2000, another Measure 9 made it to the ballot.

The gist of these measures was to prohibit the public schools from using materials that would give credence to homosexuality. Opponents argued that the spirit of these ballot measures would enable a witch hunt for gays.

The first Measure 9 lost by more than 250,000 votes. Measure 13 lost by about 38,000 votes. The second Measure 9 lost by about 86,000 votes.

The first Measure 9 drew national attention, because this was the boldest move to put anti-gay language into the law books of a state that was presumably progressive. Measure 13 would have placed anti-gay language into the Oregon Constitution.

In communities like Astoria the split was apparent in lawn signs. The letters page of this newspaper was rife with readers' opinions for and against the measures. *The Daily Astorian* opposed all three ballot measures in numerous editorials.

Trade Bill divides Democratic Party

Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley oppose each other

Last week's vote to provide President Obama with fast-track authority on a far-reaching trans-Pacific trade deal revealed a deepening fissure in the Democratic Party.

Nowhere was that more evident than here in Oregon.

While the president and Republican leaders found something to agree on, our two Democratic senators didn't. Their debate provided an illuminating look at their party's internal debate over America's role in the world and the impact of trade on U.S. workers.

As the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, Ron Wyden was co-author of the trade promotion bill. He worked with Republicans and coaxed Democrats to support the deal. He took to the Senate floor to deliver closing arguments ahead of the final vote, which passed 60-38.

"This is our chance to set a new course," Wyden said. "This is our chance to put in place higher standards in global trade ... and ensure that our country writes the rules of the road."

Merkley also spoke from the Senate floor, offering an impassioned, point-by-point rebuttal.

For Astoria, a drive to subordinate certain Oregonians was reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan's presence in the 1920s. Oregon's Klan was virulently anti-Catholic. When the Klan captured Astoria City Council seats in the election of 1922, certain city workers, such as the fire chief, lost their jobs because of their Catholicism. A letter writer to this newspaper said: "The 19th of May, 1922, will go down in the history of Clatsop County as the 'Bloody Friday'." It was then that race was pitted against race, religion against religion, church against church, gods against gods ..."

Opponents of gay marriage have used an image of a zero-sum game in which allowing gays to marry would diminish the value of marriage between heterosexuals. President Obama has offered a useful perspective that dismantles the assertion. At the Charleston funeral of Rev. Clementa Pinckney last Friday, the president said: "My liberty depends on you being free, too."

If America stands for anything, it ought to be human freedom and the rights of citizens. Our nation's progress in that direction has been a long slog. The Court's decision last Friday was an essential step in that direction.

He argued that the president was wrong in claiming that the deal contained tough environmental and labor standards: "We are repeating the same basic structure of the other (trade) agreements with no changes for America and therefore no improvements for the workers of America."

Their disagreement is unusual. Wyden and Merkley vote the same 92 percent of the time. On farm bills. On trillion-dollar spending bills. And on other major legislation. But on international trade, they go separate ways.

The trade deal vote on trade pits the interests of two big Democratic Party constituents — the AFL-CIO and the environmental community — against Democrats like Wyden who believe globalization is an opportunity for American workers rather than a threat.

We concur with Wyden. It is in America's strategic interests to set the trade rules for 38 percent of the world's economy. The trade deal also counters China's efforts to create its own Asia-Pacific trading bloc.

Intensified trade, not protectionism, will make Oregon, the nation and our Pacific trading partners more competitive

On lowering the Confederate flag

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — After a massacre like the one at Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, our immediate reaction is to do something. Something, for politicians, means legislation.

And for Democratic politicians, this means gun control.

It's the all-purpose, go-to, knee-jerk solution. Within hours of the massacre, President Obama was lamenting the absence of progress on gun control. A particular Democratic (and media) lament was Congress' failure to pass anything after Sandy Hook.

But the unfortunate fact is that the post-Sandy Hook legislation would have had zero effect on the events in Charleston. Its main provisions had to do with assault weapons; Dylann Roof was using a semi-automatic pistol.

You can pass any gun law you want. The 1994 assault weapons ban was allowed to expire after 10 years because, as a Justice Department study showed, it had no effect. There's only one gun law that would make a difference: confiscation. Everything else is for show.

And in this country, confiscation is impossible. Constitutionally, because of the Second Amendment. Politically, because doing so would cause something of an insurrection. And culturally, because Americans cherish — cling to, as Obama once had it — their guns as a symbol of freedom. You can largely ban guns in Canada where the founding document gives the purpose of confederation as the achievement of "peace, order and good government." Harder to disarm a nation whose founding purpose is "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

With gun control going nowhere, the psychic national need post-Charleston to nonetheless do something took a remarkable direction: banishment of the Confederate flag, starting with the one flying on the grounds of the statehouse in Columbia, then spreading like wildfire to consume Confederate flags, symbols, statues and even memorabilia

Hooray for Obamacare, Supreme Court

By PAUL KRUGMAN

New York Times News Service

Was I on the edge of my seat, waiting for the Supreme Court decision on Obamacare subsidies?

No — I was pacing the room, too nervous to sit, worried that the court would use one sloppily worded sentence to deprive millions of health insurance, condemn tens of thousands to financial ruin, and send thousands to premature death.

It didn't. And that means that the big distractions — the teething problems of the website, the objectively ludicrous but nonetheless menacing attempts at legal sabotage — are behind us, and we can focus on the reality of health reform. The Affordable Care Act is now in its second year of full operation; how's it doing?

The answer is, better than even many supporters realize.

Start with the act's most basic purpose, to cover the previously uninsured. Opponents of the law insisted that it would actually reduce coverage; in reality, around 15 million Americans have gained insurance.

But isn't that a very partial success, with millions still uncovered? Well, many of those still uninsured are in that position because their state governments have refused to let the federal government enroll them in Medicaid.

Beyond that, you need to realize that the law was never intended or expected to cover everyone. Undocumented immigrants aren't eligible, and any system that doesn't enroll people automatically will see some of the population fall through the cracks. Massachusetts has had guaranteed health coverage for almost a decade, but 5 percent of its nonelderly adult



AP Photo/Rainier Ehrhardt

Protesters hold a sign during a rally to take down the Confederate flag at the South Carolina Statehouse Tuesday Columbia. The shooting deaths of nine people at a black church in Charleston, S.C., have reignited calls for the Confederate flag flying on the grounds of the Statehouse in Columbia to come down.

everywhere — from the Alabama state capitol to eBay and Amazon.

Logically, the connection is tenuous. Yes, Roof does pose with the Confederate flag, among other symbols of racism, on his website. But does anyone imagine that if the South Carolina flag had been relegated to a museum, the massacre would not have occurred?

Politically, the murders created a unique moment. Gov. Nikki Haley was surely sincere in calling for the Confederate flag's removal. But she also understood that the massacre had created a moment when the usual pro-Confederate flag feeling — and, surely, expressions of it — would be largely suppressed, presenting the opportunity to achieve something otherwise politically unachievable.

But there's a deeper reason for this rush to banish Confederate symbols, to move them from the public square to the museum. The trigger was not just the massacre itself, but even more tellingly, the breathtaking display of nobility and spiritual generosity by the victims' relatives. Within 48 hours of the murder of their loved ones, they spoke of redemption and reconciliation and even forgiveness of the killer himself. It was an astonishingly moving expression of Christian charity.

Such grace demands a response. In a fascinating dynamic, it created a feeling of moral obligation to reciprocate in some way. The flag was not material to the crime itself, but its connection to the underlying race history behind the crime suggested

that its removal from the statehouse grounds — whatever the endlessly debated merits of the case — could serve as a reciprocal gesture of reconciliation.

The result was a microcosm of — and a historical lesson in — the moral force of the original civil rights movement, whose genius was to understand the effect that combating evil with good, violence with grace would have on a fundamentally decent American nation.

America was indeed moved. The result was the civil rights acts. The issue today is no longer legal equality. It is more a matter of sorting through historical memory.

The Confederate flags would ultimately have come down. That is a good thing. They are now coming down in a rush. The haste may turn out to be problematic.

We will probably overshoot, as we are wont to do, in the stampede to eliminate every relic of the Confederacy. Not every statue has to be smashed, not every memory banished. Perhaps we can learn a lesson from Arlington National Cemetery, founded by the victorious Union to bury its dead. There you will find Section 16. It contains the remains of hundreds of Confederate soldiers grouped around a modest, moving monument to their devotion to "duty as they understood it" — a gesture by the Union of soldierly respect, without any concession regarding the taintedness of their cause.

Or shall we uproot them as well?

population remains uninsured.

Suppose we use 5 percent uninsured as a benchmark. How much progress have we made toward getting there? In states that have implemented the act in full and expanded Medicaid, data from the Urban Institute show the uninsured falling from more than 16 percent to just 7.5 percent — that is, in year two we're already around 80 percent of the way there. Most of the way with the ACA!

But how good is that coverage? Cheaper plans under the law do have relatively large deductibles and impose significant out-of-pocket costs. Still, the plans are vastly better than no coverage at all, or the bare-bones plans that the act made illegal. The newly insured have seen a sharp drop in health-related financial distress, and report a high degree of satisfaction with their coverage.

What about costs? In 2013 there were dire warnings about a looming "rate shock"; instead, premiums came in well below expectations. In 2014 the usual suspects declared that huge premium increases were looming for 2015; the actual rise was just 2 percent. There was another flurry of scare stories about rate hikes earlier this year, but as more information comes in it looks as if premium increases for 2016 will be bigger than for this year but still modest by historical standards — which means that premiums remain much lower than expected.

And there has also been a sharp slowdown in the growth of overall health spending, which is probably due in part to the cost-control measures, largely aimed at Medicare, that were also an important part of health reform.

What about economic side ef-



Paul Krugman

fects? One of the many, many Republican votes against Obamacare involved passing something called the Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act, and opponents have consistently warned that helping Americans afford health care would lead to economic doom. But there's no job-killing in the data: The U.S. economy

has added more than 240,000 jobs a month on average since Obamacare went into effect, its biggest gains since the 1990s.

Finally, what about claims that health reform would cause the budget deficit to explode? In reality, the deficit has continued to decline, and the Congressional Budget Office recently reaffirmed its conclusion that repealing Obamacare would increase, not reduce, the deficit.

Put all these things together, and what you have is a portrait of policy triumph — a law that, despite everything its opponents have done to undermine it, is achieving its goals, costing less than expected, and making the lives of millions of Americans better and more secure.

Now, you might wonder why a law that works so well and does so much good is the object of so much political venom — venom that is, by the way, on full display in Justice Antonin Scalia's dissenting opinion, with its rants against "interpretive jiggery-pokery." But what conservatives have always feared about health reform is the possibility that it might succeed, and in so doing remind voters that sometimes government action can improve ordinary Americans' lives.

That's why the right went all out to destroy the Clinton health plan in 1993, and tried to do the same to the Affordable Care Act. But Obamacare has survived, it's here, and it's working. The great conservative nightmare has come true. And it's a beautiful thing.