

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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A 14-letter word that spells security

The US must make safe bridges a national priority

Infrastructure. It's not as divisive as the death penalty. It's not as emotional as abortion. It's not as worrisome as gun violence.

But of all the topics facing national politicians today, it surely is one of the most important.

Without solid infrastructure — bridges and highways — the United States will literally come to a halt.

But over the past six decades or more, the nation's leaders from both parties have chosen to put their spending priorities elsewhere. It is even more regrettable that the biggest share of federal spending has been for foreign wars that have cost the lives of our military personnel and billions of dollars of taxpayers' money.

That is money that could have been better spent elsewhere: on our vital infrastructure.

Now the lack of priority given to the ongoing maintenance and improvement of our bridges is becoming evident. Some have not had a decent fix for six to nine decades.

The latest warning bell has been sounded by the infrastructure advocacy group Transportation for America, which has produced a report called "The Fix We're in For: The State of Oregon's Bridges."

The group used details from the Federal Highway Administration to paint a grim picture of infrastructure in Clatsop County.

They discovered that 17 of Clatsop County's 147 bridges were structurally deficient. That makes us the second-worst county in the state. Let's be clear. That doesn't necessarily imply all are unsafe. But it does mean our old bridges need some serious TLC — and soon.

The structurally deficient

Don't do drugs

July 1, marijuana became legal to possess without a prescription.

For years now, personal-use amounts were nearly decriminalized in this state, a poorly regulated medical program was put in place and an omnipresent black market allowed recreational users avenues to access the drug.

But this is real deal-legalization. No more fake medical conditions. No more hiding grow rooms in moldy basements, or grow sites on out-of-the-way land. No more buying from a shady dealer down the street. If you are 21 years of age and on private property, you can possess four marijuana plants or 8 ounces of the ready-to-use portion. And you can toke up in front of your mother, the mayor and the chief of police.

Hooray?

We're in favor of reducing the black market, increasing state tax dollars and ending the wasteful, hypocritical and often racist drug war. We also think this is a good chance for freedom fighters and personal liberty supporters to put their money where their mouth is, and maybe open the eyes to the benefits of such freedom to people on the other side of the political spectrum.

That means we're in favor of legalization. But that doesn't mean we're in favor of using marijuana.

The drug is helpful to some, harmless to most and a real drag to a few. But so are Big Macs, whiskey, tobacco and video games, which can be just as addicting and debilitating. Yet we all realize those are issues of personal choice and personal acceptance of danger, don't we?

And just because it's legal doesn't mean a Big-Mac-a-day habit is a good one. It's the same with marijuana. Just because pot is legal now doesn't mean you should become a habitual, or even a casual user.

In countries where marijuana has long been legal, the drug isn't for addicts or college party animals. A majority of users are middle aged and middle class, and use it to relax on Sundays while they read a book and drink coffee. It's hardly reefer madness.

Where and if marijuana shops can open in our area remains up for debate. State legislators, who dragged their feet on making important decisions on this matter until well past the eleventh hour, are still trying to decide.

But that doesn't mean we have to put off those decisions about our own habits. Spend your money elsewhere. Pick up a book, go outside, bake an old-fashioned brownie. Don't use marijuana, but it's nice to know we will no longer be wasting public money and energy cracking the skulls of those who do.

The sunny side of big greed

By FRANK BRUNI

New York Times News Service

In the dire prophecies of science-fiction writers and the fevered warnings of left-wing activists, big corporations will soon rule the earth — or already do.

Fine with me.

They've been great on the issue of the Confederate battle flag. Almost immediately after the fatal shooting of nine black churchgoers in Charleston, S.C., several prominent corporate leaders, including the heads of Wal-Mart and Sears, took steps to retire the banner as a public symbol of the South; others made impassioned calls for that.

And when Nikki Haley, the South Carolina governor, said that the Confederate flag at the State House should come down, she did so knowing that Boeing and BMW, two of the state's major employers, had her back. In fact the state's chamber of commerce had urged her and other politicians to see the light.

Eli Lilly, American Airlines, Intel and other corporations were crucial to the defeat or amendment of proposed "religious freedom" laws in Indiana, Arkansas and Arizona over the last year and a half. Their leaders weighed in against the measures, which licensed anti-gay discrimination, and put a special kind of pressure on politicians, who had to worry about losing investment and jobs if companies with operations in their states didn't like what the government was doing.

And if it were up to corporations, we'd have the immigration reform we sorely need. Early last year, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce publicized a letter that urged Congress to act on "modernizing our immigration system." It was signed by 246 enterprises large and small, including Apple, AT&T, Caterpillar, Facebook, Goldman Sachs, Google, McDonald's, Marriott and Microsoft.

Are these companies acting in their own interests? Absolutely. They're trying to make sure that laws and lo-



AP Photo/David Goldman

A Confederate flag flies at the base of Stone Mountain June 30 in Stone Mountain, Ga. At Georgia's iconic Stone Mountain — where the Confederacy is enshrined in a giant bas-relief sculpture, the Ku Klux Klan once held notorious cross-burnings and rebel battle flags still wave prominently, officials are considering what to do about those flags.

cal customs don't prevent them from attracting and retaining the best workforce. They're burnishing their brands in a manner that they hope will endear them to customers.

But those efforts, coupled with whatever genuine altruism and civic obligation some corporate leaders feel, have produced compelling recent examples of companies showing greater sensitivity to diversity, social justice and the changing tides of public sentiment than lawmakers often manage to.

Corporations aren't paralyzed by partisan bickering. They're not hostage to a few big donors, a few loud interest groups or some unyielding ideology.

"They're ultimately more responsive to a broader group of voters — customers — than politicians are," said Bradley Tusk, whose firm, Tusk Strategies, does consulting for both private corporations and public officials.

"If you're a politician and all you care about is staying in office, you're worried about a small group of voters in your district who vote in the primary," he told me, referring to members of the House of Representatives. "If you're a corporation, you need to be much more in sync with public opinion, because you're appealing to people across the spectrum."

And so, he added, "Ironically, a lot of corporations have to be far more democratic than democratically elected officials."

Newsweek observed as much in a story published this week, noting that inclusiveness "may not be good politics in this day of polarization and micro-targeting, but it seems to be

If it were up to corporations, we'd have the immigration reform we sorely need.

The worst deal in U.S. diplomatic history

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — The devil is not in the details.

It's in the entire conception of the Iran deal, animated by President Obama's fantastical belief that he, uniquely, could achieve detente with a fanatical Islamist regime whose foundational purpose is to cleanse the Middle East of the poisonous corruption of American power and influence.

In pursuit of his desire to make the Islamic Republic into an accepted, normalized "successful regional power," Obama decided to take over the nuclear negotiations. At the time, Tehran was reeling — the rial plunging, inflation skyrocketing, the economy contracting — under a regime of international sanctions painstakingly constructed over a decade.

Then, instead of welcoming Congress' attempt to tighten sanctions to increase the pressure on the mullahs, Obama began the negotiations by loosening sanctions, injecting billions into the Iranian economy (which began growing again in 2014) and conceding in advance an Iranian right to enrich uranium.

It's been downhill ever since. Desperate for a legacy deal, Obama has played the supplicant, abandoning every red line his administration had declared essential to any acceptable deal.

Inspections

They were to be anywhere, anytime, unimpeded. Now? Total cave. Unfettered access has become "managed access." Nuclear inspectors will have to negotiate and receive Iranian approval for inspections. Which allows them denial and/or crucial delay for concealing any clandestine activities.

To give a flavor of the degree of our



Charles Krauthammer

capitulation, the administration played Iran's lawyer on this one, explaining that, after all, "the United States of America wouldn't allow anybody to get into every military site, so that's not appropriate." Apart from the absurdity of morally equating America with the world's foremost state sponsor of terrorism, if we were going to parrot the Iranian position, why wait 19 months to do so — after repeatedly insisting on free access as essential to any inspection regime?

Coming clean on past nuclear activity

The current interim agreement that governed the last 19 months of negotiation required Iran to do exactly that. Tehran has offered nothing. The administration had insisted that this accounting was essential because how can you verify future illegal advances in Iran's nuclear program if you have no baseline?

After continually demanding access to their scientists, plans and weaponization facilities, Secretary of State John Kerry two weeks ago airily dismissed the need, saying he is focused on the future, "not fixated" on the past. And that we have "absolute knowledge" of the Iranian program anyway — a whopper that his staffers had to spend days walking back.

Not to worry, we are told. The accounting will be done after the final deal is signed. Which is ridiculous. If the Iranians haven't budged on disclosing previous work under the current sanctions regime, by what logic will they comply after sanctions are lifted?

Sanctions relief

These were to be gradual and staged

good business. And that is making the business community the sort of 'big tent' political force that neither major political party can claim to be."

Major financial institutions were well ahead of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and other Democratic politicians when it came to same-sex marriage. The leaders of these banks and hedge funds lent their voices and considerable sums of money to its legalization in New York in 2011.

And Amazon, Starbucks, Nordstrom and other companies in Washington state worked to ensure passage of a marriage-equality referendum there back in November 2012.

Under the stewardship of Howard Schultz, Starbucks alone has been a paragon of corporate munificence and social consciousness in areas ranging from higher education to race relations. Back in 2011, Schultz used his corporate pulpit to bemoan congressional sclerosis and try to exert more cooperation among Democrats and Republicans on debt reduction; he succeeded in getting more than 100 other chief executives to pledge to withhold political donations until Congress made bipartisan progress.

Between 2010 and 2014, Unilever increased the fraction of materials it got from farms with sustainable practices to roughly one-half from less than one-fifth. And the software company Infor participated in a multimillion-dollar program to provide free tickets to *Selma* for American schoolchildren.

The list goes on. And while it doesn't erase the damage that corporations wreak on the environment or their exploitation of workers paid too little, it does force you to admit that corporations aren't always the bad guys. Sometimes the bottom line matches the common good, and they're the agents of what's practical, wise and even right.

as the International Atomic Energy Agency certified Iranian compliance over time. Now we're going to be releasing up to \$150 billion as an upfront signing bonus. That's 25 times the annual budget of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. Enough to fuel a generation of intensified Iranian aggression from Yemen to Lebanon to Bahrain.

Yet three months ago, Obama expressed nonchalance about immediate sanctions relief. It's not the issue, he said. The real issue is "snap-back" sanctions to be reimposed if Iran is found in violation.

Good grief. Iran won't be found in violation. The inspection regime is laughable and the bureaucratic procedures endless. Moreover, does anyone imagine that Russia and China will reimpose sanctions? Or that the myriad European businesses preparing to join the Iranian gold rush the day the deal is signed will simply turn around and go home?

Non-nuclear-related sanctions

The administration insisted that the nuclear talks would not affect separate sanctions imposed because of Iranian aggression and terrorism. That was then. The administration is now leaking that everything will be lifted.

Taken together, the catalog of capitulations is breathtaking: spot inspections, disclosure of previous nuclear activity, gradual sanctions relief, retention of non-nuclear sanctions.

What's left? A surrender document of the kind offered by defeated nations suing for peace. Consider: The strongest military and economic power on earth, backed by the five other major powers, armed with what had been a crushing sanctions regime, is about to sign the worst international agreement in American diplomatic history.

How did it come to this? With every concession, Obama and Kerry made clear they were desperate for a deal.

And they will get it. Obama will get his "legacy." Kerry will get his Nobel. And Iran will get the bomb.