

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## Legislature was decisive

*What you think of it depends on where you stand in the economy*

**A** list of accomplishments of the Oregon Legislature must start with this: It adjourned on schedule.

Our neighbors to the north have gone into triple overtime, breaking the record for longest legislative session in Washington state history.

Count too as a major success that Oregon legislators brushed off — like crumbs on a picnic table — the early-session drama of Gov. Kitzhaber's resignation. Once Kate Brown took office, legislators of both parties got down to the people's business — or at least the business of the people who donate.

Higher education was a big winner. Lawmakers approved a stunning 22 percent increase in funding for community colleges and universities. Most of the funding will go for student financial aid and rebuilding administrative positions cut during the recession. Community colleges will test a tuition-free program.

Funding for K-12 education increased, but at a much lower rate. Public school buildings will get expensive, but much needed seismic improvements.

With solid majorities in the House and Senate, Democrats were in firm control. As expected, Portland-area politicians controlled the agenda. Their liberal wing constituencies — environmentalists, public employee unions and social activists — secured important gains:

- Gov. Brown extended an order requiring a 10 percent reduction in carbon emissions from cars and trucks over the next decade. This was a huge win for environmentalists after Democrats failed to renew the standard two years ago. But the victory cost the governor a transportation funding agreement.

- The Oregon Education Association pushed through HB 2655, which allows parents to easily get their children out of new standardized education tests based on Common Core standards. The teachers' union is concerned how test results impact school accountability and teacher evaluations. Passage, however, jeopardizes \$140 million in annual federal funding for Oregon schools. The OEA also won big with money to implement full-day kindergarten, which will add more teaching jobs.

## It's about time

*Buying contraception from pharmacists is a logical move*

**S**afe and accessible birth control is key to a host of gains in maternal and child well-being, economic advancement for families and nations, and may even lower the crime rate.

Starting early next year, laws signed by Oregon Gov. Kate Brown last week will allow pharmacists to prescribe oral contraceptives and hormonal contraceptive patches for a year at a time. Coming 55 years after "the pill" first became available in the U.S., this step finally normalizes something that should always be a woman's choice: Whether to go through the life-altering and sometimes hazardous process of pregnancy and motherhood.

Living in this time in one of the world's most advanced nations, we can scarcely imagine what it was like here before 1960 — and how it still is in many less-developed nations — with women endlessly pregnant, many dying prematurely, and families with far too many mouths to feed. We romanticize childhood and motherhood — in many ways rightly so — but there isn't much that can be said in favor of having eight children and losing several of them to illness and poverty.

Smaller families and an ability for women to integrate pregnancies with their working lives have greatly improved living standards in the U.S. and other advanced nations. The children

- Victories for special-interest activists included an expansion of background checks on gun sales and creation of a LGBT coordinator position within the Department of Veterans' Affairs to help veterans discharged because of their sexual orientation.

The session was notable for several firsts. Oregon became the first state to automatically register people to vote when they receive a driver's license. We also became the first to require health insurance plans to offer a year's worth of birth-control supplies in a single purchase. A companion measure allows women to get oral contraceptives directly from a pharmacy without a doctor's visit. There were also ample examples of trivial politics. Legislators tried, but failed to remove the Mississippi state flag from Capitol grounds because it contains the Confederate symbol. There were proposals to ban the declawing of cats and allow dogs to ride in the beds of farm vehicles.

Marijuana dominated the session as lawmakers grappled with rules to govern its legalization. They reached difficult compromises on taxes and local sales of pot — and did so on bipartisan terms. Oregon businesses dodged a staggering increase in the minimum wage. But proponents already are collecting signatures for an initiative measure. Employers were saddled with new paid sick leave requirements and restrictions on when to ask job applicants about prior criminal convictions.

Lawmakers showed remarkable restraint not spending all the projected tax revenue. They set aside \$300 million in reserves to help cushion the impact of much higher pension costs following the Supreme Court's rejection of cutting payments to public retirees. It's a small down payment. More will be required — from taxpayers, government and public employee unions — in the years ahead.

What you think of this session depends on where you stand in the economy. It can be said that this session largely was decisive. That is, legislators did their job.

who are planned are cherished and are more likely to grow up to lead successful lives themselves.

Birth control drugs and devices aren't 100 percent safe and effective. Efforts to relax the degree of physician involvement in managing them have long been fought off because of a sincere belief that direct contact between healthcare providers and patients will help avoid contraception-related problems. At the same time, the necessity to visit a provider in order to obtain a prescription is an opportunity to keep tabs on reproductive and general wellness.

But on balance, the cost-benefit ratio has clearly shifted in favor of moving this service to pharmacists, who are themselves highly trained professionals capable of counseling women and directing them to specialists if more complicated issues arise. Being able to obtain a year's worth of oral contraceptives from a neighborhood pharmacy without a prescription represents a substantial savings in terms of time, hassle and money. This will reduce the odds of unplanned pregnancies during gaps between prescriptions. (Women will be required to start with a three-month supply to see whether there are any adverse reactions before being able to buy pills for a year.)

California already has a similar but somewhat less comprehensive law. Washington state should certainly follow Oregon's lead.

# Take heart, Pluto gets a fly-by

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER  
*Washington Post Writers Group*

**W**ASHINGTON — We need a pick me up.

Amid the vandalizing of Palmyra, the imminent extinction of the northern white rhino, the disarray threatening Europe's most ambitious attempt ever at peaceful unification — amid plague and pestilence and, by God, in the middle of Shark Week — where can humanity turn for uplift?

Meet New Horizons, arriving at Pluto Tuesday. Small and light, the fastest spacecraft ever launched, it left Earth with such velocity that it shot past our moon in nine hours. A speeding bullet the size of a Steinway, it has flown 9 1/2 years to the outer edges of the solar system.

To Pluto, the now-demoted "dwarf planet" that lives beyond the Original Eight in the far distant "third zone" of the solar system — the Kuiper Belt, an unimaginably huge ring of rocks and ice and sundry debris where the dwarf is king.

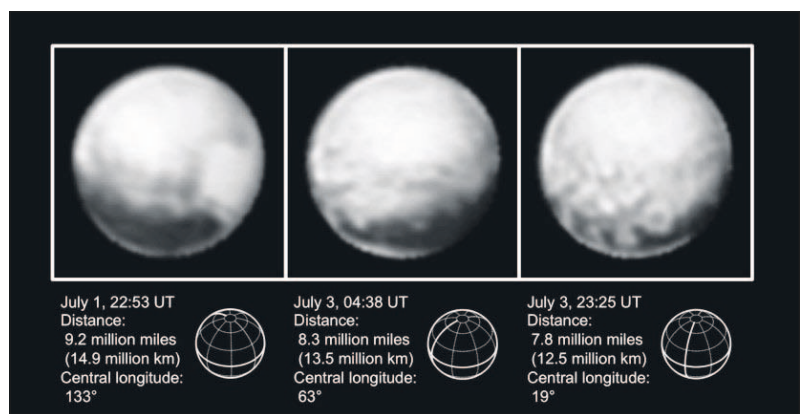
After 3 billion miles, New Horizons will on Tuesday shoot right through Pluto's mini-planetary system of five moons, the magnificently named Charon, Styx, Nix, Hydra and Kerberos.

Why through? Because, while the other planets lie on roughly the same plane, Pluto and its moon system stick up at an angle to that plane like a giant archery target. New Horizons gets one pass, going straight by the bull's-eye. No orbiting around, no lingering for months or even years to photograph and study.

No mulligans. And no navigating. Can't do that when it takes 4 1/2 hours for a message from Earth to arrive. This is a preprogrammed, single-take, nine-day deal.

For what? First, for the science, the coming avalanche of new knowledge. Remember: We didn't even know there was a Pluto until 85 years ago when astronomer Clyde Tombaugh found a strange tiny dot moving across the star field.

Today, we still know practically nothing. In fact, two of the five



July 1, 22:53 UT  
 Distance: 9.2 million miles (14.9 million km)  
 Central longitude: 133°

July 3, 04:38 UT  
 Distance: 8.3 million miles (13.5 million km)  
 Central longitude: 63°

July 3, 23:25 UT  
 Distance: 7.8 million miles (12.5 million km)  
 Central longitude: 19°

NASA/AP File

This combination of images from July 1 to July 3, provided by NASA shows Pluto at different distances from the New Horizons spacecraft. NASA's New Horizons spacecraft is on track to sweep past Pluto next week despite hitting a "speed bump" that temporarily halted science collection.



Charles Krauthammer

moons were not discovered until after New Horizons was launched. And yet next week we will see an entirely new world come to life. "We're not planning to rewrite any textbooks," said principal investigator Alan Stern in a splendid New York Times documentary on the mission. "We're planning to write them from scratch."

Then there's the romance. The Pluto fly-by caps a half-century of solar system exploration that has yielded staggering new wonders. Such as Europa, one of Jupiter's moons, with its vast subterranean ocean under a crust of surface ice, the most inviting potential habitat for extraterrestrial life that human beings will ever reach.

Yes, ever. Promising exoplanets — the ones circling distant stars that

## New Horizons gets one pass, going straight by the bull's-eye.

we deduce might offer a Goldilocks zone suitable for water-based life — are being discovered by the week. But they are unreachable. The journey to even the nearest world, at New Horizons speed, take 280,000 years. Even mere communication would be absurdly difficult. A single exchange of greetings — "Hi there," followed by "Back at you, brother" — would take a generation.

It's the galactic version of the old Trappist monastery joke where every seven years one monk at

one meal is allowed one remark. A young novice arrives and after seven years a monk stands up at dinner and says: "The soup is cold."

Seven years of silence. Then another monk stands and says: "The bread is stale."

Seven years later, the now-aging novice rises and says: "If you don't stop this bickering, I'm outta here."

Which is what a conversation with Klingons would be like, except with longer intervals. Which is why we prefer to scour our own solar system. And for more than just the science, more than just the romance. Here we are, upright bipeds with opposable thumbs, barely down from the trees, until yesterday unable to fly, to communicate at a distance, to reproduce a sound or motion or even an image — and even today barely able to manage the elementary decencies of civilization — taking close-up pictures and chemical readings of a mysterious world 9 1/2 years away.

One final touch. Every ounce of superfluous weight has been stripped from New Horizons to give it

more speed and pack more instruments. Yet there was one concession to poetry. New Horizons is carrying some of Clyde Tombaugh's ashes. After all, he found the dot.

Not only will he fly by his netherworldly discovery, notes Carter Emmart of the American Museum of Natural History, he will become the first human being to have his remains carried beyond the solar system.

For the wretched race of beings we surely are, we do, on occasion, manage to soar.

# Attention span in the online age

By DAVID BROOKS  
*New York Times News Service*

**I**f you're like most of us, you're wondering what the Internet is doing to your attention span.

You toggle over to check your phone during even the smallest pause in real life.

You feel those phantom vibrations even when no one is texting you. You have trouble concentrating for long periods.

Over the past few years researchers have done a lot of work on attention span, and how the brain is being resculpted by all those hours a day spent online. One of the conclusions that some of them are coming to is that the online life nurtures fluid intelligence and offline life is better at nurturing crystallizing intelligence.

Being online is like being a part of the greatest cocktail party ever and it is going on all the time. If you email, text, tweet, Facebook, Instagram or just follow Internet links you have access to an ever-changing universe of social touch-points. It's like you're circulating within an infinite throng, with instant access to people you'd almost never meet in real life.

Online life is so delicious because it is socializing with almost no friction. You can share bon mots, photographs, videos or random moments of insight, encouragement, solidarity or good will. You live in a state of perpetual anticipation because the next social encounter is just a second away. You can control your badinage and click yourself away when boredom lurks.

This form of social circulation takes the pressure off. I know some people who are relaxed and their best selves only when online. Since they feel more in control of the communication, they are more communi-

cative, vulnerable and carefree.

This mode of interaction nurtures mental agility. The ease of movement on the Web encourages you to skim ahead and get the gist. You do well in social media and interactive gaming when you can engage and then disengage with grace. This fast, frictionless world rewards the quick perception, the instant evaluation and the clever performance. As neuroscientist Susan Greenfield writes in her book *Mind Change*, expert online gamers have a great capacity for short-term memory, to process multiple objects simultaneously, to switch flexibly between tasks and to quickly process rapidly presented information.

Fluid intelligence is a set of skills that exist in the moment. It's the ability to perceive situations and navigate to solutions in novel situations, independent of long experience.

Offline learning, at its best, is more like being a member of a book club than a cocktail party. When you're offline you're not in constant contact with the universe. There are periods of solitary reading and thinking and then more intentional gatherings to talk and compare.

Research at the University of Oslo and elsewhere suggests that people read a printed page differently than they read off a screen. They are more linear, more intentional, less likely to multitask or browse for keywords.

The slowness of solitary reading or thinking means you are not as concerned with each individual piece of data. You're more concerned with how different pieces of data fit together. How does this relate to that? You're concerned with the narrative shape, the synthesizing theory or the



David Brooks

overall context. You have time to see how one thing layers onto another, producing mixed emotions, ironies and paradoxes. You have time to lose yourself in another's complex environment.

As Greenfield puts it, "by observing what happens, by following the linear path of a story, we can convert information into knowledge in a way that emphasizing fast response and constant stimulation cannot. As I see it, the key issue is narrative."

When people in this slower world gather to try to understand connections and context, they gravitate toward a different set of questions. These questions are less about sensation than about meaning. They argue about how events unfold and how context influences behavior. They are more likely to make moral evaluations. They want to know where it is all headed and what are the ultimate ends.

Crystallized intelligence is the ability to use experience, knowledge and the products of lifelong education that have been stored in long-term memory. It is the ability to make analogies and comparisons about things you have studied before. Crystallized intelligence accumulates over the years and leads ultimately to understanding and wisdom.

The online world is brand new, but it feels more fun, effortless and natural than the offline world of reading and discussion. It nurtures agility, but there is clear evidence by now that it encourages a fast mental rhythm that undermines the ability to explore narrative, and place people, ideas and events in wider contexts.

The playwright Richard Foreman once described people with cathedral-like personalities — with complex, inner density, people with distinctive personalities, and capable of strong permanent attachments. These days that requires an act of rebellion, among friends who assign one another reading and set up times to explore narrative and cultivate crystallized intelligence.