

# 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*

## Keeping marijuana away from kids requires vigorous efforts

*Legalization presents thorny issues*

Continuing conflicts between legal and illegal marijuana care well outlined in *Willamette Week's* July 22 story, "Deal With It: Oregon wants to crush black-market weed sales. But business is smoking."

Medical marijuana dispensaries in Oregon will be allowed to begin selling Oct. 1, but until then would-be consumers are in an odd twilight zone of being legally allowed to possess, grow use the drug at the same time nobody is legally permitted to sell it to them. As *WW's* story makes clear, unlicensed marijuana entrepreneurs still face potentially stiff penalties, but this isn't stopping them from going ahead and meeting demand.

Marijuana users can also supply themselves by growing it at home, obtaining a medical-marijuana card or going across the state line to Washington and buying from recreational suppliers already legally allowed to operate there — though it remains illegal to bring it back across state lines.

There is significant money still to be made selling black-market marijuana, *WW* found. Though the sums cited by sellers interviewed for the story may not be correct and were taken on faith by the reporter, front-line marijuana sellers claimed to net \$600 to \$800 a week. Customers range from high school students to judges. An Oregon State University professor estimated in 2013 that nearly 320,000 Oregonians bought pot that year.

The gist of the situation: "The line between the black market and the existing legal market is often hazy."

State Rep. Ann Lininger, D-Lake Oswego, who co-chaired the House-Senate committee on

marijuana, says this ambiguity reinforces the need to keep marijuana — not to mention other intoxicating substances — out the possession of young people. Irrespective of what adults may choose to do themselves, there is good reason to believe that marijuana has a detrimental long-term impact on still-developing brains, along with adversely affecting things like study skills and safe driving.

"I believe that we need to protect kids," Lininger said. "And we protect them by shrinking the black market, talking candidly to young people about why marijuana use is a bad choice for people under the age of 21, and making policies that allow young people who have made a mistake to move on with their lives."

Crushing the marijuana black-market is a tall order. It has survived for decades despite a nationwide prohibition that was, at times, harshly enforced. Nor is it easy to keep marijuana and alcohol out of the hands of youths who choose to imbibe. Oregon's version of legalization will make this more difficult, by giving every household the right to grow marijuana and keep relatively large quantities of finished product on hand. But we have to keep trying.

Ironically, perhaps the best way to protect kids in the post-legalization era is to effectively speed things on their way, making marijuana available to adults behind a retail paywall, vigorously punishing those who sell or otherwise provide it to minors.

## Early learning gives students a boost

*A creature of former governor's emphasis on pre-kindergarten*

The staff and chair of the state Early Learning Council came through Astoria last week on their way to Tillamook for a day of meetings. Created four years ago, the ELC moves its meetings around the state.

The council is a creature of former Gov. John Kitzhaber's emphasis on pre-kindergarten education. Borrowing from national research, Kitzhaber argued that learning in those years has significant impact on students' educational outcomes.

For years this newspaper — and many other advocates — have touted the importance of child care in Astoria and Clatsop County — as economic development. Two-earner parent couples and single parents without day care have scant hope of prospering in the economy.

But the ELC wants us to move that discussion well beyond custodial child care. They have benchmarks, and they are currently engaged in rating child care facilities around the state.

Years ago, the Astoria School District took the leap of putting a

number early childhood activities into one building — Gray School. With the school board's assent and collaboration from the City of Astoria, there is the Ports of Play, Head Start, the child care center called Lil' Sprouts and the alternative high school. All of these complement each other.

It is important that there be a statewide focus on early childhood education. But as we learned with the progress of child care in Clatsop County, it all comes down to local efforts and organizations and local governments that are willing to take a risk.

When the child care center at Astoria's Presbyterian Church moved to Gray School, its non-profit governing board began to lag. That's when Astoria schools and the City of Astoria came into the picture. Having the city Parks Department operate the center has given it stability. And stability is exactly what child care often lacks in rural Oregon.

We are pleased to have such a success story right here.

# Zombies against Medicare

By PAUL KRUGMAN  
*New York Times News Service*

Medicare turns 50 this week, and it has been a very good half-century. Before the program went into effect, Ronald Reagan warned that it would destroy American freedom; it didn't, as far as anyone can tell. What it did do was provide a huge improvement in financial security for seniors and their families, and in many cases it has literally been a life-saver as well.

But the right has never abandoned its dream of killing the program. So it's really no surprise that Jeb Bush recently declared that while he wants to let those already on Medicare keep their benefits, "We need to figure out a way to phase out this program for others."

What is somewhat surprising, however, is the argument he chose to use, which might have sounded plausible five years ago, but now looks completely out of touch. In this, as in other spheres, Bush often seems like a Rip Van Winkle who slept through everything that has happened since he left the governor's office — after all, he's still boasting about Florida's housing-bubble boom.

Actually, before I get to Bush's argument, I guess I need to acknowledge that a Bush spokesman claims that the candidate wasn't actually calling for an end to Medicare, he was just talking about things like raising the age of eligibility. There are two things to say about this claim. First, it's clearly false: in context, Bush was obviously talking about converting Medicare into a voucher system, along the lines proposed by Paul Ryan.

**The only real threat it faces is that of attack by right-wing zombies.**

more when such programs are successful. But when they make their case to the public they usually shy away from making their real case, and have even, incredibly, sometimes posed as the program's defenders against liberals and their death panels.

What Medicare's would-be killers usually argue, instead, is that the program as we know it is unaffordable — that we must destroy the system in order to save it, that, as Bush put it, we must "move to a new system that allows (seniors) to have something — because they're not going to have anything." And the new system they usually advocate is, as I said, vouchers that can be applied to the purchase of private insurance.

The underlying premise here is that Medicare as we know it is incapable of controlling costs, that only the only way to keep health care affordable going forward is

And second, while raising the Medicare age has long been a favorite idea of Washington's Very Serious People, a couple of years ago the Congressional Budget Office did a careful study and discovered that it would hardly save any money. That is, at this point raising the Medicare age is a zombie idea, which should have been killed by analysis and evidence, but is still out there eating some people's brains.

But then, Bush's real argument, as opposed to his campaign's lame attempt at a rewrite, is just a bigger zombie.

The real reason conservatives want to do away with Medicare has always been political: It's the very idea of the government providing a universal safety net that they hate, and they hate it even

more when such programs are successful. But when they make their case to the public they usually shy away from making their real case, and have even, incredibly, sometimes posed as the program's defenders against liberals and their death panels.

What Medicare's would-be killers usually argue, instead, is that the program as we know it is unaffordable — that we must destroy the system in order to save it, that, as Bush put it, we must "move to a new system that allows (seniors) to have something — because they're not going to have anything." And the new system they usually advocate is, as I said, vouchers that can be applied to the purchase of private insurance.

The underlying premise here is that Medicare as we know it is incapable of controlling costs, that only the only way to keep health care affordable going forward is



Paul Krugman

to rely on the magic of privatization.

Now, this was always a dubious claim. It's true that for most of Medicare's history its spending has grown faster than the economy as a whole — but this is true of health spending in general. In fact, Medicare costs per beneficiary have consistently grown more slowly than private insurance premiums, suggesting that Medicare is, if anything, better than private insurers at cost control. Furthermore, other wealthy countries with government-provided health insurance spend much less than we do, again suggesting that Medicare-type programs can indeed control costs.

Still, conservatives scoffed at the cost-control measures included in the Affordable Care Act, insisting that nothing short of privatization would work.

And then a funny thing happened: the act's passage was immediately followed by an unprecedented pause in Medicare cost growth. Indeed, Medicare spending keeps coming in ever further below expectations, to an extent that has revolutionized our views about the sustainability of the program and of government spending as a whole.

Right now is, in other words, a very odd time to be going on about the impossibility of preserving Medicare, a program whose finances will be strained by an aging population but no longer look disastrous. One can only guess that Bush is unaware of all this, that he's living inside the conservative information bubble, whose impervious shield blocks all positive news about health reform.

Meanwhile, what the rest of us need to know is that Medicare at 50 still looks very good. It needs to keep working on costs, it will need some additional resources, but it looks eminently sustainable. The only real threat it faces is that of attack by right-wing zombies.

## Trump the poison his party concocted

By TIMOTHY EGAN  
*New York Times News Service*

The adults patrolling the playpen of Republican politics are appalled that we've become a society where it's OK to make fun of veterans, to call anyone who isn't rich a loser, to cast an entire group of newly arrived strivers as rapists and shiftless criminals.



Timothy Egan

Somewhere, we crossed a line — from our mothers' modesty to strutting braggadocio, from dutiful decorum to smashing all the china in the room, from respecting a base set of facts to a trumpeting of willful ignorance.

Yes, how did we get to a point where up to one-fourth of the party of Lincoln, Eisenhower and Reagan now aligns itself with Donald Trump? Those same political marshals would have us believe he's a "demagogue," a "jack-ass," a "cancer."

They say he's trashing the Republican brand. They say he's "stirring up the crazies," in the words of Sen. John McCain. But Trump is the brand, to a sizable degree. And the crazies have long flourished in the Republican media wing, where any amount of gaseous buffoonery goes unchallenged.

And now that the party can't control him, Trump threatens to destroy its chances if he doesn't get his way, running as an independent with unlimited wealth — a political suicide bomb.

Trump is a byproduct of all the toxic elements Republicans have thrown into their brew over the last decade or so — from birtherism to race-based hatred of immigrants, from nihilists who shut down government to elected officials who shout "You lie!" at their commander in chief.

It was fine when all this crossing-of-the-line was directed at President Barack Obama or other Democrats. But now that the ugliness is intramural, Trump has forced party leaders to decry something they have not only tolerated, but encouraged.

Consider Trump's swipe against McCain's military service, and by extension all veterans who have been involved in the fog of combat. Republicans were apologetic at Trump's claim that McCain was no war hero.

"All of our veterans, particularly POWs, deserve our respect and admiration," said Jeb Bush. The Republican National Committee was quick to lay down a similar principle, saying, "There is no place in our country for comments that disparage those who have served honorably."

No place except a presidential campaign, that being the 2004 attempt to destroy the candidate John Kerry's record of honorable service in Vietnam. Where was Bush's "respect and admiration" when his brother was benefiting

from a multi-million-dollar smear of a Navy veteran with a Silver Star, a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart?

The wise men predicted Trump's demise after he demeaned a former prisoner of war. But polls posted late last week showed Trump still in the lead. How can he get away with bashing combat veterans? Simple: The party he now wants to represent wrote the playbook on it.

The racism toward Mexicans that Trump has stirred up has been swooshing around the basement of the Republican Party for some time. Rep. Steve King of Iowa did Trump one better in 2013 when he said undocumented immigrants had "calves the size of cantaloupes because they're hauling 75 pounds of marijuana across the desert."

Did this make King a pariah? Not judging by the number of presidential candidates who showed up at his Iowa Freedom Summit in

January, there to curry his favor. Among them was Rick Perry, the former Texas governor. This week Perry called Trumpism "a toxic mix of demagoguery, mean-spiritedness and nonsense that will lead the Republican Party to perdition if followed."

Using the X-ray vision of his new glasses, Perry has correctly diagnosed the problem, and forecast the outcome. But that toxic mix has been just the tonic for his party for years, including Perry's suggestion that Texas might have to secede. Obama was barely into his first months in office when Rep. Joe Wilson of South Carolina shouted "You lie!" at him in a joint session of Congress. For hurling that insult, Wilson was widely praised in conservative media circles.

Trump also stoked the humiliating lie about Obama's citizenship. He began that crusade, he claimed, because so many Republicans still believe it and have encouraged him to keep it alive.

Now, the only way to trump Trump is to act like a fool in public. So Sen. Rand Paul, formerly seen raising good questions about national issues, fired up a chain saw and took it to the tax code a few days ago — a pathetic stunt. And there was Sen. Lindsey Graham, flummoxed by Trump's exposing

him as sycophant to a plutocrat, destroying his cellphone in a blender. It only made us long for the real thing: Dan Aykroyd's Bass-O-Matic.

All of this overshadowed the entry into the race of Gov. John Kasich of Ohio, a sensible conservative who could beat Hillary Clinton. But he won't get any traction until Republicans destroy Donald Trump and the vulgar, nativist element in their party that they nurtured — until it became a monster.

**But now that the ugliness is intramural, Trump has forced party leaders to decry something they have not only tolerated, but encouraged.**