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Astoria City Council does the heavy lifting

In Verizon tower choice, it's impossible to satisfy all constituencies

When the newly elected President John Kennedy assembled a Cabinet that was glittering with Ivy League degrees, House Speaker Sam Rayburn was unimpressed. After Vice President Lyndon Johnson expressed his amazement at this group’s collective brilliance, Speaker Rayburn said: “They may be every bit as intelligent as you say, but I’d feel a whole lot better about them if just one of them had run for sheriff once.”

Rayburn’s colorful allusion was that high level presidential appointees often have no appreciation for where the rubber meets the road — for the mundane basis of government and politics.

If you watched the Astoria City Council grapple with the Verizon tower issue — through Derrick DePledge’s reporting — you got a taste of what makes the councilor’s job difficult. In a nutshell, the council could not satisfy all constituencies in a matter such as this.

But the physics of the Verizon matter were direct. As Assistant City Manager Brad Johnston said, the council in 2013 directed city staff to

move the Verizon tower off Coxcomb Hill. And in the last fiscal year, the council set the completion of emergency communications as a goal.

Adam Haas, of Converge Communications, told the council that erecting a monopole in Shively Park was “the lesser of the evils.” That is another way of saying that politics is the art of the possible.

DePledge noted that council approval is only the first step. The city Planning Commission and Historic Landmarks Commission will also have their say.

Meanwhile, councilors made a decision. In a matter this thankless and difficult, that is admirable.

Federal regulators should take close look at Oregon LNG, oil-by-rail

The era of taking fossil fuel companies at their word is over

Federal regulators play increasingly powerful roles in shaping the Lower Columbia River’s future as communities find ourselves on the front line of international energy transportation.

There are indications that one key agency will work to allow major projects to proceed, while some others won’t automatically rubber-stamp plans.

This week, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission issued a draft report saying Oregon LNG’s proposed \$6 billion terminal and pipeline project would harm the environment. Last week, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the National Park Service voiced worries about potential damage from a plan to build the nation’s biggest oil-by-rail terminal on the Columbia River in Vancouver, Wash.

In each case, agencies and project proponents can highlight ways in which harm can be minimized or avoided altogether by careful designs, safety practices and other steps. Regarding Oregon LNG plans, the typically pro-development FERC appears willing to be convinced that the project can be made safe enough to proceed.

FERC’s analysis fails in several respects. For example, FERC concludes that fishing boats forced out of the way of LNG tankers can simply return to what they were doing immediately after ships pass, without suffering any adverse effects. This assumption betrays a lack of understanding of how fishing boats operate. Significant interruptions are not so easily accommodated.

FERC also appears to attach little importance to hazards associated with storing large quantities of liquefied natural gas on a shoreline subject to massive subduction zone earthquakes and tsunamis. The agency’s report concludes the project can

be made to “provide acceptable layers of protection that would reduce the risk of a potentially hazardous scenario from developing into an event that could impact the off-site public.” This sounds all too much like the bland assurances of absolute safety made for Japan’s Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plants before an earthquake and tsunami turned them into a radioactive wasteland.

The EPA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can — and should — also prepare their own findings and recommendations for the LNG facility.

In contrast to FERC, EPA said of Vancouver oil terminal plans that they would violate the federal Clean Water Act and should not be allowed to go any further until deficiencies are addressed. The National Park Service expressed reservations about how oil development will impact the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. NPS also expresses the broader view that going along with a big new fossil-fuel facility will harm more-distant national assets such as ice fields in Glacier National Park.

Corporate memories and consciences are short, Without firm and consistent enforcement of strict rules, environmental compliance will slide. Taxpayers and local communities too often are left to deal with pollution and cleanup costs after accidents occur. Agencies must hold a firm line and place the burden on fossil-fuel companies to prove they have the assets and staying power to make good on promises.

Oregon LNG, which lost a court battle last week with the Army Corps over a property-rights issue, deserves particularly rigorous scrutiny to make sure it is able to do everything it claims. The era of taking fossil fuel companies at their word ended for good when the Arctic started melting.

New Yorker story draws attention

I just want to thank *The New Yorker* magazine for letting us all know that a hugely destructive earthquake and tsunami could hit us at any time.

If it hadn’t been for that story, we on the North Coast might never have realized the danger we are in.

It’s not like I and other local journalists — including author Bonnie Henderson, who wrote the book, “The Next Tsunami: Living on a Restless Coast” — haven’t been writing about this for many years.

Entitled “The Really Big One” with a subhead, “The earthquake that will devastate the Pacific Northwest,” the story, written by Kathryn Schulz in the July 20 *New Yorker*, is accompanied by a topographical map of the West Coast of North America in red.

At the coastline, from south of the California border extending to beyond Canada, the map looks like it has been ripped apart; a wide jagged band of white — resembling a huge wave — covers all of the West Coast and heads east.

The caption next to the illustration says, “The next full rupture of the Cascadia Subduction Zone will spell the worst natural disaster in the history of the continent.”

Scary, huh?

I have followed the Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami story for over eight years. My first story in the spring of 2007 included an interview with Rob Witter, formerly of the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries (now with the U.S. Geological Service in Alaska), who had just discovered that sand originally from the beach in Cannon Beach had been thrown about a mile east of what is now U.S. Highway 101 during a past tsunami. Witter made the discovery after filtering soil and determining its properties and age in several areas between the beach and forest east of town.

State geologists created a new map for Cannon Beach, showing that land higher than 30 feet in elevation wasn’t as safe as experts originally thought. The tsunami inundation zone now reached 80 feet high.

With that news, the research intensified. Oregon State University Coastal and Ocean faculty, along with staffers from Department of Geology and Mineral Industries, roamed the coast, seeking clues revealing the potential intensity and destructive path of the next Casca-

IMPRESSIONS

By NANCY MCCARTHY

dia earthquake and tsunami.

They wrote reports about the sturdiness of local schools and other buildings. They created a model of the city of Cannon Beach in Oregon State’s wave research laboratory, knocked it down with model tsunami waves and studied their effect, then recreated the town and started all over again.

They created a computer simulation of Seaside, showing how long it would take a tsunami to reach shore, then Necanicum Drive, then the highway and Wahanna Road and how many people would die as the waves washed over them.

A similar computer simulation was done for Cannon Beach, as well, showing how many people

State geologists drew new tsunami maps for all of the Oregon Coast.

And at each step, I and other reporters were there, updating our readers and listeners on the latest developments. Some people paid attention and prepared. Others ignored it. Until *The New Yorker* writer discovered that the West Coast faced potential, overwhelming disaster.

“When the next full-margin rupture happens,” Schulz wrote, “that region (the Pacific Northwest) will suffer the worst natural disaster in the history of North America.” It will kill 13,000 people and injure another 27,000, she says, citing the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s estimates. Shelter will be needed for 1 million people.

But we already knew that, didn’t we? Well, at least the rest of the nation knows now.

My question is this: Will *The New Yorker* story make any difference in our urgency to prepare for an event that, geologically speaking, could happen any time? I hope so, because, to be honest, no matter how much we local journalists covered it, our stories never garnered as much attention as this one story has.

My question is this: Will The New Yorker story make any difference in our urgency to prepare for an event that, geologically speaking, could happen any time?

But what’s going to be interesting on a whole other level is the local fallout from the July 28 *New Yorker*’s follow-up story to Schulz’s original article.

Schulz answers several questions that arose following her initial story. This is what she advises tourists:

“If you are an out-of-towner planning to spend a night in the tsunami zone: don’t ... Go to the coast by day, for sure. But if you’re staying overnight, book a vacation rental, hotel room or campsite outside the inundation zone.”

For the coastal towns that depend on overnight visitors, this *New Yorker* story might portend another, immediate disaster.

Nancy McCarthy recently retired as editor of the Seaside Signal and the Cannon Beach Gazette. Her column appears monthly.

Trump’s allure: Ego as ideology

By DAVID BROOKS
New York Times News Service

When America is growing and happy, the country is sort of like a sprinter’s track. As Robert H. Wiebe put it in his classic book “The Segmented Society,” when things were going well the diverse country comprised “countless isolated lanes where Americans, singly or in groups, dashed like rows of racers toward their goals.”

In times of scarcity and alienation, it’s more like bumper cars. Different groups feel their lanes are blocked, so they start crashing into one another. The cultural elites start feuding with the financial elites. The lower middle class starts feuding with the poor.

A few decades ago the sociologist Jonathan Rieder studied what was then the white working-class neighborhood of Canarsie, Brooklyn. People there were hostile both to their poorer black neighbors, who they felt threatened their community, and to the Manhattan elites, who they felt sold them out from above.

We are now living in a time of economic anxiety and political alienation. Just three in 10 Americans believe that their views are represented in Washington, according to a CNN/ORC poll. Confidence in public institutions like schools, banks and churches is near historic lows, according to Gallup. Only 29 percent of Americans think the nation is on the right track, according to Rasmussen.

This climate makes it hard for the establishment candidates who normally dominate our politics. Jeb Bush is swimming upstream. Hillary Clinton

may win through sheer determination, but she’s not a natural fit for this moment.

A career establishment figure like Joe Biden doesn’t stand a chance. He’s a wonderful man and a great public servant, but he should not run for president this year, for the sake of his long-term reputation.

On the other hand, bumper-car politicians thrive. Bernie Sanders is swimming with the tide. He’s a conviction politician comfortable with class conflict. Many people on the left have a generalized, vague hunger for fundamental systemic change or at least the atmospherics of radical change.

The times are perfect for Donald Trump. He’s an outsider, which appeals to the alienated. He’s confrontational, which appeals to the frustrated. And, in a unique 21st-century wrinkle, he’s a narcissist who thinks he can solve every problem, which appeals to people who in challenging times don’t feel confident in their understanding of their surroundings and who crave leaders who seem to be.

Trump’s populism is pretty standard. He appeals to people who, as Walter Lippmann once put it, “feel rather like a deaf spectator in the back row. ... He knows he is somehow affected by what is going on. ... (But) these public affairs are in no convincing way his affairs. They are for the most part invisible. They are managed, if they are managed at all, at distant centers, from behind the scenes by unnamed powers. ... In the cold light of experience, he knows that his sovereignty is a fiction. He reigns in theory, but in fact he does not govern.”

When Trump is striking populist chords, he appeals to people who ex-

David Brooks

perience this invisibility. He appeals to members of the alienated middle class (like those folks in Canarsie) who believe that neither the rich nor the poor have to play by the same rules they do. He appeals to people who are resentful of immigrants who get what they, allegedly, don’t deserve.

But Trump’s support base is weird. It skews slightly more secular and less educated than the average Republican, but he doesn’t draw from any distinctive blocs. Unlike past populisms he’s not especially rural or urban, ethnic based or class based. He draws people as individuals, not groups.

Unlike past populisms, his main argument is not that the elites are corrupt or out of touch. It is that they are morons. His announcement speech was fascinating (and compelling). “How stupid are our leaders?” he asked rhetorically. “Our president doesn’t have a clue,” he continued. “We have people that are stupid,” he observed of the leadership class.

In other words, it’s not that our problems are unsolvable or even hard. It’s not that we’re potentially a nation in decline. The problem is that we don’t have a leadership class as smart, competent, tough and successful as Donald Trump.

Measured in standard political terms he is not ideologically consistent. As Peter Wehner pointed out, he’s taken so many liberal positions he makes Susan Collins look like Barry Goldwater. But ego is his ideology, and in this he is absolutely consistent. In the Trump mind the world is not divided into right and left. Instead there are winners and losers. Society is led by losers, who scorn and disrespect the people who are actually the winners.

Never before have we experienced a moment with so much public alienation and so much private, assertive and fragile self-esteem. Trump is the perfect confluence of these trends. He won’t be president, but he’s not an aberration. He is deeply rooted in the currents of our time.

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