



Daily Astorian File

EO Media Group Director of Digital Services Crindalyn Lyster works on [dailyastorian.com](http://dailyastorian.com). The digital team chose Disqus to help moderate comments on the site.

## If you don't tell us what is wrong, we can't fix it

If you are in business, you learn to deal with dissatisfied customers. Grocery stores, restaurants and newspapers draw different sorts of complaints. But the way that each of us might respond to the unhappy customer has common elements.

The most important thing is dialogue. Without a free exchange of information, it is difficult for the business to improve things and move forward.

A recent incident causes me to revisit the basics of customer service.

A local social services agency has been upset with *The Daily Astorian* over the reporting of a suicide. This sort of thing has happened before. But the wrinkle is that the agency has not talked with our editors.

When people call us to complain about some aspect of our operation, I thank them. My point is that if they don't tell us what's wrong, we can't help them or respond by changing our procedure.

Some years ago I was impressed with the phone call from a reader whose political values are more conservative than those typ-

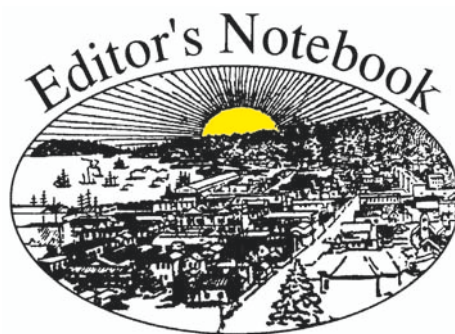
**If a comment thread heads into dangerous territory, we decide to stop it.**

ically apparent on our editorial page. His argument convinced me to add George F. Will to our list of columnists. Then we switched from Will to Charles Krauthammer.

At the same time, I have tried to engage another periodic critic in conversation. He does not respond to invitations for an in-person visit. That aspect of our cyberculture — in which people metaphorically shoot at you behind the anonymity of email — marks a breakdown in our culture. I expect it in a big city. But in a small town it is most strange.

Several years ago we created a User's Guide. It was meant to be a manual on how to use our organization. On at least two occasions we invited local nonprofit organizations to a session at which our managers told them how best to use us. Our hope was to demystify our operation and open the door.

When you call our newspaper between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., you get a person. And if you ask for an editor, advertising manager or



business manager and they are in the building, you'll get them on the line. Our accessibility is the most tangible manifestation of our need to hear what our customers know.

The difference between this newspaper and those in much larger markets is our sense of the intimacy of the communities we serve. Feedback comes to us in many ways, but it often comes from people we know, not from what sociologists call a secondary or tertiary relationship.

Reporting sex crimes is sensitive. The surprising thing in too many communities is the frequent incidence of such crimes. Our crime reporter covers a lot of such legal proceedings.

In the wake of one recent judgment, our reader comments veered into blaming the victim of the crime. Our managing editor made the decision to stop the discussion

rather than vet the many long comments that made claims we could not verify or were generally mean-spirited.

We use a commenting service called Disqus that can aggregate information about comments and provide a "reliability" score on those that are flagged by readers. We rely on those flags to help make the newsroom aware of inappropriate posts or spam. It would be impossible to moderate every comment quickly after it's posted. We do not edit comments, so if there is a questionable post, it is normally deleted. If a comment thread heads into dangerous territory, we decide to stop it.

These are our guidelines, which are posted with every story:

- **Stay on topic:** This helps keep the thread focused on the discussion at hand. If you would like to discuss another topic, look for a relevant article.

- **Share with us:** We'd love to hear eyewitness accounts, the history behind an article, and smart, constructive criticism.

- **Be civil:** It's OK to have a difference in opinion but there's no need to be a jerk. We reserve the right to delete any comments we feel are spammy, off-topic, or reckless to the community.

- **Be proactive:** Use the 'Flag as Inappropriate' link at the upper-right corner of each comment to let us know of abusive posts.

—S.A.F.



Steve Forrester

## Mr. Obama, try these arguments for your Iran deal

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF  
*New York Times News Service*

It would be a catastrophe for American influence in the world if Congress killed the Iranian nuclear deal.

Perhaps because the stakes are so high, the debate has become poisonous. Critics are (ludicrously) accusing President Barack Obama of appealing to anti-Semitic tropes. And Obama (petulantly) suggested that some opponents were "alarmist," "ignorant," "not being straight" and "making common cause" with Iranians who chant "Death to America."

Obama's rhetoric was counterproductive. As former Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, a Texas Republican, told me, "At this point, the president has made it impossible for a Republican to vote for it." Constituent calls to congressional offices are overwhelmingly against the deal, and with Sen. Chuck Schumer defying the White House by opposing it, the opposition is more bipartisan than the support is. That's tragic, for killing the deal would infuriate many allies, isolate America rather than Iran and ultimately increase the risk of ayatollahs with nuclear weapons.

I've already explained why I'm

strongly in favor of the deal, and I urge Obama to start over with his sales job and focus on three points.

First: Sure, the deal is imperfect, but it's the best way to achieve a goal we all share passionately — preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

The great majority of arms experts support the deal, some enthusiastically, some grudgingly. They recognize shortcomings, but, on balance, as 29 of America's leading nuclear scientists and arms experts wrote in an open letter last week, it has "much more stringent constraints than any previously negotiated nonproliferation framework."

Likewise, three dozen retired American generals and admirals released a joint letter declaring the deal "the most effective means currently available to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons."

Iran would go from maybe a few months from a bomb to a year away. The agreement doesn't solve the underlying problem, but it may buy us 15 years.

Yes, it would be nice if Iran gave up all its enriched uranium. But isn't it better that it give up 98



Nicholas Kristof

percent of its stockpile than that it give up none?

Everyone knows Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel opposes the deal, but not everyone realizes other Israelis with far more security expertise support it. Ami Ayalon, former head of Israel's Shin Bet security service, describes it as "the best possible alternative." And Efraim Halevy, former head of the Mossad, says, "What is the point of canceling an agreement that distances Iran from the bomb?"

Second, it's true that Iran may try to cheat, but it's easier to catch and stop the cheating with the deal than without.

Critics sometimes note that President Bill Clinton reached an agreement on nuclear weapons with North Korea in 1994, only to see North Korea cheat. The lesson they draw is that it's pointless to negotiate with untrustworthy rogue regimes.

I've covered North Korea since I was a young reporter in Asia in the 1980s, and the lesson is actually more like the opposite.

That 1994 agreement was indeed flawed, and North Korea violated it. But even so, in the

eight years the agreement was in place, North Korea made zero nuclear weapons, according to American intelligence estimates. After the deal collapsed in 2002, the Bush administration turned to a policy of confrontation, and North Korea then made perhaps nine nuclear weapons.

Third, if all goes south, or if Iran is stalling us and after 15 years races to a weapon, we retain the option of a military strike.

I asked David Petraeus, retired four-star general and former head of the CIA, about that. "I strongly believe," he told me, "that there will continue to be a viable military option should Iran seek to break out and construct a nuclear device after the expiration of many of the elements of the inspections regime at the 15-year mark of the agreement."

To me, this deal is ugly and flawed — and infinitely better than the alternatives. The criticisms of the deal strike me as rea-

sonable, but the alternatives that the critics propose seem unreasonable and incoherent.

So Obama should hit the restart button. He should acknowledge that the deal has shortcomings but also emphasize that it must be judged not by a referendum on its terms but rather as a choice: deal or no deal.

He can also take steps to reassure doubters. We could boost funding for the International Atomic Energy Agency to make oversight more effective. We could do more to speak up for human rights in Iran and to counter Iranian meddling in the region, especially in Syria.

Gen. Brent Scowcroft, the patriarch of Republican security experts, tells me that he supports the Iran deal in part because it exemplifies American leadership on a crucial global issue. I agree, and for Congress to kill it will not just set back American leadership, it will also increase the odds that Iran gets the bomb.

**Isn't it better that it give up 98 percent of its stockpile than that it give up none?**



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