

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## Do a more rigorous job

Electing lawmakers sometimes develop such frustration with the internal processes of government institutions that they hope for some kind of end-run repair around situations they consider to be broken.

An Oregon manifestation of this “prayer for a cure” comes from state Sen. Betsy Johnson. According to our Capital Bureau, Sen. Johnson plans to introduce a bill next year to create a citizen watchdog committee to hold state agencies accountable for meeting spending and policy goals. Johnson cites frustration with state officials who mislead lawmakers about how agencies spend money and the progress of major projects, such as the state’s failed Cover Oregon insurance exchange. She says that when agency staff members “just flat fib to the Legislature ... there ought to be consequences.”

On this point, Johnson is certainly correct: State personnel who lie to the Legislature or fail to accurately follow budgets and enacted laws should have their feet held to the fire. Johnson is less convincing when she says an entirely new body of citizen overseers should be responsible for insisting on accuracy and accountability. Such a citizens group already exists: It is called the Oregon Legislature. In addition, lawmakers already have their own staff of lawyers, accountants, economists and other experts. The Secretary of State’s Office also fulfills auditing functions.

In theory, Johnson’s proposal would provide additional staffing by finding qualified volunteers to insist on accountability in ways that are beyond the Legislature’s

capacities. In today’s busy world, recruiting and retaining such a cadre of citizen superheroes would be a daunting task. Finding objective and dedicated members without their own axes to grind — and then managing their oversight activities — would by itself require considerable staffing and legislative involvement.

The kinds of thorny issues that arise — problems like the Cover Oregon debacle — require deep study, long-term commitment, rapid response and fair-minded devotion to compromise. The kind of volunteer system Johnson appears to envision — a sort of old-fashioned New England town hall meeting applied to statewide issues — is pleasantly idealistic but unlikely to work in today’s fractured and divisive political environment.

Although the Legislature’s power to discipline lying, lazy and unresponsive state employees has limits, it is certainly within lawmakers’ purview to investigate, publicly rebuke and cut funds to agencies that permit such misbehavior. If current laws are inadequate or punishments are insufficient, legislators are specifically empowered to strengthen them.

Johnson said, “I don’t think that we do nearly as rigorous a job as we should in tracking where those (agency) dollars go and how they’re spent.”

The answer is for legislators to do a more rigorous job.

## Two good things come to an end ... for now

The Astoria Sunday Market had a good run this summer. Its final day was Oct. 11. The market is bounded by seasonality — starting in late spring and ending in midautumn. Astoria’s cruise ship traffic — which is linked to the Alaskan route — respects the same seasonal boundaries.

It would be nice if some national fixtures could return to the boundaries they once respected. Watching baseball players in northern latitudes wear neck gaiters like football players on a 45 degree night with wind chill is perverse. In the words of the former editor of this newspaper, “That’s not baseball.”

Major League Baseball’s season extends into the first week of November, which could become problematic this year. As with all professional sports, it’s about television revenues.

In its 15th season, the Sunday Market had a very good run. Director Cyndi Mudge says this year’s vendor sales rivaled those of 2007, which was the market’s banner year. And vendors enjoyed excellent weather.

As we say goodbye to the Sunday Market and cruise ship

visitors, it is important to recognize the economic value of both. By that we do not mean the immediate revenues — in dock rentals to the Port of Astoria or to downtown retailers on Sundays. There are longer term gains from both of these activities. Cruisers who visit Astoria help put the town on the map. In some cases, cruise visitors return. It’s like the economic significance of our two boutique hotels — the Elliott and Cannery Pier. Their singularity attracts high-end travelers, who discover Astoria and sometimes set down roots.

Likewise, the Sunday Market shows off the new vitality of Astoria’s downtown, while also contributing to it. The market also is a symbiotic partner of the burgeoning local foods movement.

Unlike the Hood to Coast relay, which strangles Seaside on an August weekend, the Sunday Market and the cruise ship visitor population are manageable. They do not overwhelm the town.

As we prepare for winter, fall leaves us with pleasant memories. Next June, they will return. That’s a good thing.

# Something not rotten in Denmark

By PAUL KRUGMAN  
*New York Times News Service*

No doubt surprising many of the people watching the Democratic presidential debate, Bernie Sanders cited Denmark as a role model for how to help working people. Hillary Clinton demurred slightly, declaring that “we are not Denmark,” but agreed that Denmark is an inspiring example.

Such an exchange would have been inconceivable among Republicans, who don’t seem able to talk about European welfare states without adding the word “collapsing.” Basically, on Planet GOP all of Europe is just a bigger version of Greece. But how great are the Danes, really?

The answer is that the Danes get a lot of things right, and in so doing refute just about everything U.S. conservatives say about economics. And we can also learn a lot from the things Denmark has gotten wrong.

Denmark maintains a welfare state — a set of government programs designed to provide economic security — that is beyond the wildest dreams of American liberals. Denmark provides universal health care; college education is free, and students receive a stipend; day care is heavily subsidized. Overall, working-age families receive more than three times as much aid, as a share of GDP, as their U.S. counterparts.

To pay for these programs, Denmark collects a lot of taxes. The top income tax rate is 60.3 percent; there’s also a 25 percent national sales tax. Overall, Denmark’s tax take is almost half of national income, compared with 25 percent in the United States.

Describe these policies to any American conservative, and he would predict ruin. Surely those generous benefits must destroy the incentive to work, while those high taxes drive job creators into hiding or exile.

Strange to say, however, Denmark doesn’t look like a set from “Mad Max.” On the contrary, it’s a prosper-

ous nation that does quite well on job creation. In fact, adults in their prime working years are substantially more likely to be employed in Denmark than they are in America. Labor productivity in Denmark is roughly the same as it is here, although GDP per capita is lower, mainly because the Danes take a lot more vacation.

Nor are the Danes melancholy: Denmark ranks at or near the top on international comparisons of “life satisfaction.”

It’s hard to imagine a better ref-

**Denmark maintains a welfare state — a set of government programs designed to provide economic security — that is beyond the wildest dreams of American liberals.**

utation of anti-tax, anti-government economic doctrine, which insists that a system like Denmark’s would be completely unworkable.

But would Denmark’s model be impossible to reproduce in other countries? Consider France, another country that is much bigger and more diverse than Denmark, but also maintains a highly generous welfare state paid for with high taxes. You might not know this from the extremely bad press France gets, but the French, too, roughly match U.S. productivity, and are more likely than Americans to



Paul Krugman

be employed during their prime working years. Taxes and benefits just aren’t the job killers right-wing legend asserts.

Going back to Denmark, is everything copacetic in Copenhagen? Actually, no. Denmark is very rich, but its economy has taken a hit in recent years, because its recovery from the global financial crisis has been slow and incomplete. In fact, Denmark’s 5.5 percent decline in real GDP per capita since 2007 is comparable to the declines in debt-crisis countries like Portugal or Spain, even though Denmark has never lost the confidence of investors.

What explains this poor recent performance? The answer, mainly, is bad monetary and fiscal policy. Denmark hasn’t adopted the euro, but it manages its currency as if it had, which means that it has shared the consequences of monetary mistakes like the European Central Bank’s 2011 interest rate hike. And while the country has faced no market pressure to slash spending — Denmark can borrow long-term at an interest rate of only 0.84 percent — it has adopted fiscal austerity anyway.

The result is a sharp contrast with neighboring Sweden, which doesn’t shadow the euro (although it has made some mistakes on its own), hasn’t done much austerity, and has seen real GDP per capita rise while Denmark’s falls.

But Denmark’s monetary and fiscal errors don’t say anything about the sustainability of a strong welfare state. In fact, people who denounce things like universal health coverage and subsidized child care tend also to be people who demand higher interest rates and spending cuts in a depressed economy. (Remember all the talk about “debasing” the dollar?) That is, U.S. conservatives actually approve of some Danish policies — but only the ones that have proved to be badly misguided.

So yes, we can learn a lot from Denmark, both its successes and its failures. And let me say that it was both a pleasure and a relief to hear people who might become president talk seriously about how we can learn from the experience of other countries, as opposed to just chanting “USA! USA! USA!”

## India’s Bitiya is a rapist’s nightmare

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF  
*New York Times News Service*

LUCKNOW, India — For as long as anyone can remember, upper-caste men in a village here in northern India preyed on young girls. The rapes continued because there was no risk: The girls were destroyed, but the men faced no repercussions.

Now that may be changing in the area, partly because of the courage of one teenage girl who is fighting back. Indian law doesn’t permit naming rape victims, so she said to call her Bitiya — and she is a rapist’s nightmare. This isn’t one more tragedy of sexual victimization but rather a portrait of an indomitable teenager whose willingness to take on the system inspires us and helps protect other local girls.

I’m on my annual win-a-trip journey, in which I take a university student along on a reporting trip to the developing world. The winner, Austin Meyer of Stanford University, and I see in Bitiya a lesson for the world about the importance of ending the impunity that so often surrounds sexual violence, including in the United States.

Bitiya, who is from the bottom of the caste system, is fuzzy about her age but thinks she was 13 in 2012 when four upper-caste village men grabbed her as she worked in a field, stripped her and raped her. They filmed the assault and warned her that if she told anyone they would release the video and also kill her brother.

So Bitiya initially kept quiet. Six weeks later Bitiya’s father saw a 15-year-old boy watching a pornographic video — and was aghast to see his daughter in it. The men were selling the video in a local store for a dollar a copy.

Bitiya is crying in the video and is held down by the men, so her family accepted that she was blameless. Her father went to the police to file a report.

The police weren’t interested in following up, but the village elders were. They decided that Bitiya, an excellent student, should be barred from

the local public school.

“They said I was the wrong kind of girl, and it would affect other girls,” Bitiya said. “I felt very bad about that.”

Eventually, public pressure forced the school to take her back, but the village elders continue to block the family from receiving government food rations, apparently as punishment for speaking out.

In the background hovers caste. Bitiya is a Dalit, once considered untouchable, at the bottom of the hierarchy.

**The rape suspects had to sell land to pay bail, and everybody in the area now understands that raping girls may actually carry consequences.**

Civil society scrutiny belatedly led to the arrest of four men, who were then released on bail. The case has been dragging on since, and Bitiya’s father died of a heart attack after one particularly brutal court hearing. The family also fears that members of upper castes will kill Bitiya’s 16-year-old brother, so he mostly stays home — which means he can’t take jobs, leaving the family struggling to afford food.

The rape suspects offered a \$15,000 settlement if Bitiya’s family would drop the case, bringing the money in cash to her home with its dirt floor. Bitiya had never seen so much cash — but scoffs that she wouldn’t accept twice as much.



Nicholas Kristof

“I want them in jail,” Bitiya says. “Then everyone watching will know that people can get punished for this.”

“I never felt tempted,” her grandfather adds.

Bitiya says she does not feel disgraced, because the dishonor lies in raping rather than in being raped. And the resolve that she and her family display is having an

impact. The rape suspects had to sell land to pay bail, and everybody in the area now understands that raping girls may actually carry consequences. So while there were many rapes in the village before Bitiya’s, none are believed to have occurred since.

Madhavi Kuckreja, a longtime women’s activist who is helping Bitiya, says the case reflects a measure of progress against sexual violence.

“There has been a breaking of the silence,” Kuckreja said. “People are speaking up and filing cases.”

Kuckreja notes that the cost of sexual violence is a paralyzing fear that affects all women and girls. Fearful parents “protect” daughters from sexual violence and boys in ways that impede the girls’ ability to get an education, use the Internet or cellphones, or get a good job. For every girl who is raped, Kuckreja says, many thousands lose opportunities and mobility because of fear of such violence.

That holds back women, but also all of India. The International Monetary Fund says that India’s economy is stunted by the lack of women in the formal economy.

In one village, I asked a large group of men about rape. They insisted that they honor women and deplore rape — and then added that the best solution after a rape is for the girl to be married to the rapist, to smooth over upset feelings.

“If he raped her, he probably likes her,” explained Shiv Govind, an 18-year-old.

I’m rooting for Bitiya and strong girls like her to change those attitudes and end the impunity that oppresses women and impoverishes nations.

## Where to write

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