

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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Need for workforce housing is palpable

The Astoria-born historian Dorothy Johansen was fond of saying: “History is made up of two things – continuity and change.” These days, there seems to be more change than continuity. When one revisits some cities and towns, they seem to have changed beyond recognition.

This week’s issue of *Willamette Week* carries a compelling confessional titled “Portland, I Love You, but You’re Forcing Me Out.” The writer, who is an artist named Carye Bye, tells of being priced out of San Francisco, finding a golden moment in Portland that ended when her rent was jacked up. So she’s off to San Antonio.

If you lived in Portland two decades prior to Bye, you might say that era seemed like a golden period, when the city boasted a large middle class. The crush of rising home prices and rent hikes on the West Coast makes one wonder how ordinary people can afford to live in San Francisco or Seattle, for instance.

Bye’s most pungent com-

ment on the place she is leaving is: “Today Portland feels like a theme park version of itself.”

Astoria lately has become a receiver of former Portlanders, Californians and Seattlites. Our home prices and rentals have been a magnet. At the same time, feverish bidding on homes is a new thing in this market. And vacant rentals are more scarce. At a recent Astoria City Council meeting, the rental landlord Sean Fitzpatrick said that the town’s effective vacancy rate is zero. Articles in Wednesday’s and today’s edition report on that topic.

Housing defines what can happen in a city or town. The need for more Astoria workforce housing is palpable.

Students whose families move are a reality

Why not plan and coordinate for that?

At about this point in every recent year, Oregon gets to have a good old-fashioned flagellation about high school graduation rates that hover near the bottom of national rankings. It was statewide news this week when 2014 statistics showed Oregon 47th in the U.S. — up from 50th a year before, better only than 51st place Washington, D.C.

Oregon’s improvement mostly came from redefining graduates to include “students with special needs who earned modified diplomas, and students who delayed receiving a diploma in order to pursue low-cost college credits,” according to OPB’s report. Putting an implausible gloss on the news, a state education official expressed pride in how well each and every student is being prepared for life.

Washington state’s graduation rate also is less than stellar, coming in 38th in this week’s news.

Considering we in the Pacific Northwest — like residents of the mythical village of Lake Wobegon — consider all our children to be above average, it’s a blow to self-esteem and sense of economic destiny to be told more than a quarter of Oregon’s young people aren’t successfully finishing the basic hurdle of high school.

This is a matter of serious concern and deserves plenty of attention. But there is too much focus on individual schools and not nearly enough on state and national failings.

Astoria Principal Lynn Jackson makes an entirely valid point about how graduation statistics can be warped from one year to the next by some families’ unsettled lives. Students who land in Astoria, attend school for a few weeks, and then just as swiftly

depart, make an oversized impact on graduation rates. Countywide, two-thirds to three-quarters of each year’s class does successfully complete high school. They are very likely to have also benefited from stable home lives, an advantage that is entirely alien to students whose families are constantly on the move.

Instead of congratulating or castigating ourselves for a few percentage points change in graduation success or failure, society and state agencies ought to be creating better ways to maintain a rigorous focus on individual students, strategies that span across district boundaries and state lines.

In our interconnected nation, educators must develop much better ways to mitigate the damage to children when parents move around. Though it will be controversial among those who favor local control over all other considerations, keeping kids from falling through the cracks deserves strong national and regional coordination. There should be individual education-success plans that stick with students, even when their families move from California to Oregon to Washington, and back again. There must be resources and an interstate management structure to make these plans effective.

Yes, let’s hold school districts accountable. But the real issue is national responsibility for mentoring students in a mobile society, in which economic uncertainties guarantee many families will have to uproot children time after time. We need to base education policies on the belief that every citizen has a stake in the success of every student, not just the ones that happen to be in our district at any given moment.

The plot to change Catholicism

By ROSS DOUTHAT
New York Times News Service

The Vatican always seems to have the secrets and intrigues of a Renaissance court — which, in a way, is what it still remains.

The ostentatious humility of Pope Francis, his scoldings of high-ranking prelates, have changed this not at all; if anything, the pontiff’s ambitions have encouraged plotters and counterplotters to work with greater vigor.

And right now the chief plotter is the pope himself.

Francis’ purpose is simple: He favors the proposal, put forward by the church’s liberal cardinals, that would allow divorced and remarried Catholics to receive communion without having their first marriage declared null.

Thanks to the pope’s tacit support, this proposal became a central controversy in last year’s synod on the family and the larger follow-up, ongoing in Rome right now.

But if his purpose is clear, his path is decidedly murky. Procedurally, the pope’s powers are near-absolute: If Francis decided tomorrow to endorse communion for the remarried, there is no Catholic Supreme Court that could strike his ruling down.

At the same time, though, the pope is supposed to have no power to change Catholic doctrine. This rule has no official enforcement mechanism (the Holy Spirit is supposed to be the crucial check and balance), but custom, modesty, fear of God and fear of schism all restrain popes who might find a doctrinal rewrite tempting.

And a change of doctrine is what conservative Catholics, quite reasonably, believe that the communion proposal favored by Francis essentially implies.

There’s probably a fascinating secular political science tome to be written on how the combination of absolute and absolutely-limited power shapes the papal office. In such a book, Francis’ recent maneuvers would deserve a chapter, because he’s clearly looking for a mechanism that would let him exercise his powers without undercutting his authority.

The key to this search has been the synods, which have no official



Ross Douthat



Andrew Medichini/AP Photo

Pope Francis greets faithful as he arrives for his weekly general audience in St. Peter’s Square, at the Vatican, Wednesday.

doctrinal role but which can project an image of ecclesiastical consensus. So a strong synodal statement endorsing communion for the remarried as a merely “pastoral” change, not a doctrinal alteration, would make Francis’ task far easier.

Unfortunately, such a statement has proved difficult to extract — because the ranks of Catholic bishops include so many Benedict XVI and John Paul II-appointed conservatives, and also because the “pastoral” argument is basically just rubbish. The church’s teaching that marriage is indissoluble has already been pushed close to the breaking point by this pope’s new expedited annulment process; going all the way to communion without annulment would just break it.

So to overcome resistance from bishops who grasp this obvious point, first last year’s synod and now this one have been, to borrow from the Vatican journalist Edward Pentin’s recent investigative book, “rigged” by the papal-appointed organizers in favor of the pope’s preferred outcome.

The documents guiding the synod have been written with that goal in mind. The pope has made appointments to the synod’s ranks with that goal in mind, not hesitating to add even aged cardinals tainted by the sex abuse scandal if they are allied to the cause of change. The Vatican press office has filtered the synod’s closed-door (per the pope’s directive) debates to the media with that goal in mind. The churchmen charged with writing the final synod report have been selected with that goal in mind. And Francis himself, in his daily homilies, has consistently criticized Catholicism’s

“doctors of the law,” its modern legalists and Pharisees — a not-even-thinly-veiled signal of his views.

(Though of course, in the New Testament the Pharisees allowed divorce; it was Jesus who rejected it.)

And yet his plan is not necessarily succeeding. There reportedly still isn’t anything like a majority for the proposal within the synod, which is

probably why the organizers hedged their bets for a while about whether there would even be a final document. And the conservatives — African, Polish, American, Australian — have been less surprised than last fall, and quicker to draw public lines and try to box the pontiff in with private appeals.

The entire situation abounds with ironies. Aging progressives are seizing a moment they thought had slipped away, trying to outmaneuver younger conservatives who recently thought they owned the Catholic future. The African bishops are defending the faith of the European past against Germans and Italians weary of their own patrimony. A Jesuit pope is effectively at war with his own Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the erstwhile Inquisition — a situation that would make 16th century heads spin.

For a Catholic journalist, for any journalist, it’s a fascinating story, and speaking strictly as a journalist, I have no idea how it will end.

Speaking as a Catholic, I expect the plot to ultimately fail; where the pope and the historic faith seem to be in tension, my bet is on the faith.

But for an institution that measures its life span in millennia, “ultimately” can take a long time to arrive.

The chief plotter is the pope himself.

Are you sure you want the job?

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN
New York Times News Service

Having watched all the debates and seen all these people running for president, I can’t suppress the thought: Why would anyone want this job now?

Do you people realize what’s going on out there?

Barack Obama’s hair hasn’t gone early gray for nothing. I mean, Air Force One is great and all, but it now comes with Afghanistan, ISIS and the Republican Freedom Caucus — not to mention a lot of people, places and things all coming unstuck at once.

Consider the scariest news article this year. On Friday, *The Washington Post* reported that “the Justice Department has charged a hacker in Malaysia with stealing the personal data of U.S. service members and passing it to the Islamic State terrorist group, which urged supporters online to attack them.” The article explained that in June Ardit Ferizi, the leader of a group of ethnic Albanian hackers from Kosovo who call themselves Kosova Hackers Security, “hacked into a server used by a U.S. online retail company” and “obtained data on about 100,000 people.”

Ferizi, it said, “is accused of passing the data to Islamic State member Junaid Hussain, a British citizen who in August posted links on Twitter to the names, email addresses, passwords, locations and phone numbers of 1,351 U.S. military and other government personnel. He included a warning that Islamic State ‘soldiers ... will strike at your necks in your own lands!’” FBI agents tracked Ferizi “to a computer with an Internet address in Malaysia,” where he was arrested. Meanwhile, Hussain was killed by a U.S. drone in Syria.

Wow: An Albanian hacker in Malaysia collaborating with an ISIS jihadi on Twitter to intimidate U.S. soldiers online — before we killed the jihadi with a drone!

Welcome to the future of warfare: superpowers versus superempowered angry men — and a tag-team

Welcome to the future of warfare: superpowers versus superempowered angry men

of cybercriminals and cyberterrorists. They’re all a byproduct of a profound technology-driven inflection point that will greet the next president and will make the current debates look laughably obsolete in four years.

I was born into the Cold War era. It was a dangerous time with two nuclear-armed superpowers each holding a gun to the other’s head, and the doctrine of “mutually assured destruction” kept both in check. But we now know that the dictators that both America and Russia propped up in the Middle East and Africa suppressed volcanic sectarian conflicts.

The first decades of the post-Cold War era were also a time of relative stability. Dictators in Eastern Europe and Latin America gave way to democratically elected governments and free markets. Boris Yeltsin of Russia never challenged NATO expansion, and the Internet and global supply chains drove profitability up and the cost of labor and goods down. Interest rates were low, and although the income of men without college degrees declined, it was masked by rising home prices, subprime mortgages, easy credit, falling taxes and women joining the workforce, so many household incomes continued to rise.

“Up until the year 2000, over 95 percent of the next generation were better off than the previous generation,” said Richard Dobbs, a director of the McKinsey Global Institute. Therefore, even though the rich were getting even richer than those down the income ladder “it did not lead to political unrest because the middle was moving ahead, too” and were sure to be richer than their parents.

But, in the last decade, we entered the post-post-Cold War era. The combination of technological, economic and climate pressures is literally blow-



Thomas L. Friedman

ing the lid off nation-states in the Middle East and Africa, unleashing sectarian conflicts that no dictator can suppress. Bad guys are getting superempowered and “mutually assured destruction” to ISIS is not a deterrent but an invitation to heaven. Robots are milking cows and IBM’s Watson computer can beat you at “Jeopardy!” and

your doctor at radiology, so every decent job requires more technical and social skills — and continuous learning. In the West, a smaller number of young people, with billions in college tuition debts, will have to pay the Medicare and Social Security for the baby boomers now retiring, who will be living longer.

“Suddenly,” argues Dobbs, “the number of people who don’t believe they will be better off than their parents goes from zero to 25 percent or more.”

When you are advancing, you buy the system; you don’t care who’s a billionaire, because your life is improving. But when you stop advancing, added Dobbs, you can “lose faith in the system — whether that be globalization, free trade, offshoring, immigration, traditional Republicans or traditional Democrats. Because in one way or another they can be perceived as not working for you.”

And that is why Donald Trump is resonating in America, Marine Le Pen in France, the ISIS caliph in the Arab world, and Vladimir Putin in Russia. They all promise to bring back the certainties and prosperity of the Cold War or post-Cold War eras — by sacking the traditional elites who got us here and by building walls against change and against the superempowered angry men. They are all false prophets, but the storm they promise to hold back is very real.