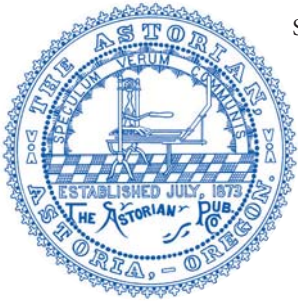


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Chronic truancy creates social costs

Blowing off education is a decision to play without a full deck

Children and their families who turn their backs on education represent a social cost and a future liability.

At a time when mere citizenship and earning a living demand literacy, math skills and critical thinking, chronic truancy is a decision to play the game of life without a full deck.

Edward Stratton's Monday article on truancy in Clatsop County schools was sobering. The saddest detail Stratton reported was that nearly one-fourth of kindergartners in the Astoria and Seaside school districts were chronically absent last school year. Kindergarten is where reading and development of social skills begin.

There is a bright spot in the county's kindergartens and it is Warrenton, which has the second lowest rate of chronic absenteeism among Oregon school districts with more than 500 students.

You might say that Warrenton has put its chips on making a good first impression. It does that by reaching out to preschoolers' families and by operating its own preschool inside the elementary school. It opens its building early for parents' convenience.

About 10 years ago, Judy

Bigby set an important goal at Astor Elementary School, of which she was principal. At parent-teacher conference time, Bigby committed her staff to making contact with one parent of every child in the school. Teachers and administrators went to front porches and into fish-packing plants.

Bigby's offensive is exactly what smart companies do with their customers. In the broadest sense, they don't let the customer drift away. And in the same sense, parents who participate in a child's decision to just drift along are doing them a disservice that sets the stage for a lifetime of financial struggle.

As communities, we cannot succumb to the lethargy that says it's OK to blow off education — especially the formative first years. Lessons ingrained in primary grades — the foundations of reading, arithmetic, how to study and interact with others — all are vital for the next stages of life.

Woody Allen observed, "Showing up is 80 percent of life." This starts in grade school.

Stay clear of coal exports, for now

Considering how little personal experience most Pacific Northwest residents have with coal, it continues to have an oversized role in regional politics. This adds interest to news about an ongoing collapse of the U.S. West's coal industry, an implosion with ramifications for Columbia River communities.

Corporations have been avidly pushing for coal-export facilities, largely as a way to bypass U.S. objections to burning coal by selling it instead to China and other Asian industrial nations. This is creating lots of political smoke in the Longview/Kelso and Bellingham areas of Washington, where companies have forged alliances with some local politicians and labor leaders. The Longview newspaper recently sported a prominent front-page headline, "Courting Coal," as coal advocates from the Powder River Basin made their most recent junket in support of the gargantuan Millennium Bulk Terminals project.

As has been the case for some time, the online news source Sightline is doing a great job of digesting and explaining coal news. This Tuesday, Sightline's Clark Williams-Derry summarized how environmental opposition to coal terminals has, in fact, saved coal corporations from making a destructive blunder.

A coal executive told Platts — a division of the McGraw Hill Financial firm — on Oct. 16 that delays in obtaining permits for the Millennium project have shielded coal producers from the Asian economic downturn:

"To some degree, I believe these agencies and environmental groups are doing the coal producers a favor by not approving or supporting the approval of these terminals," the producer said. "If the terminals were already built and in operation, few, if any, would be exporting coal as current pricing wouldn't support it."

These coal companies are clutching at Asia as a financial lifeline. Arch Coal, the nation's second-largest coal company and one of Millennium's two developers, is on the verge of bankruptcy. Its corporate debt is now rated "Junk." Another coal exporter has recently been losing \$10 to \$15 a ton on its Asian sales. Sightline figures that not having the coal terminals on their balance sheets may have saved coal companies \$700 million a year.

Coal's bad business judgment could easily turn into a financial nightmare for Northwest ports and taxpayers. Thank goodness coal skeptics have kept us out of this quagmire so far.

GUEST COLUMN

Not 'mission accomplished' for Oregon wolves

Last year, 535,000 people visited Crater Lake.

These numbers were a new record for Oregon's only national park, and thanks to an advertising campaign by Travel Oregon and the exploding popularity of outdoor recreation in the state, this year's attendance will likely set a new record.

While the natural beauty of Crater Lake has long delighted visitors, lucky park-goers have only recently been treated to an encounter that would have been unthinkable of five, 10, or even 50 years ago: the opportunity to hear the howl of a wolf in the wilderness.

It wasn't so long ago that wolves were a permanent part of Oregon's landscape. However, an aggressive, state-sponsored hunting, trapping and poisoning campaign successfully annihilated the population, culminating in 1947 when the last recorded wolf bounty was paid out.

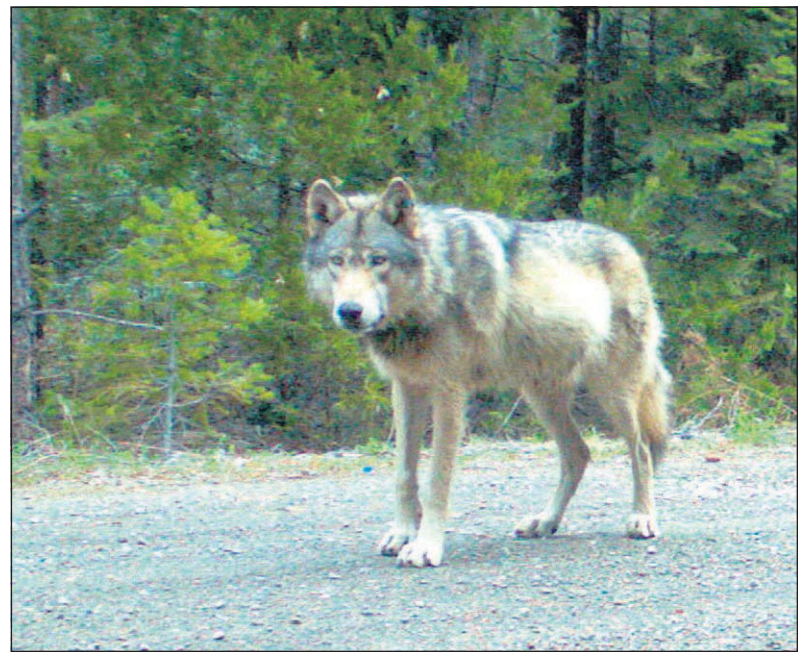
And with that, wolves were gone from Oregon.

It is only recently that wolves have started to re-establish themselves. Oregon's known wolf population is around 80 adults, almost entirely confined to the Northeast corner of the state. There are, of course, a few notable exceptions. OR-7, Oregon's world-famous wandering wolf, established the first pack in the Cascade Mountains in nearly 70 years. Other wolves, like OR-3, who recently joined his brother near Crater Lake, or the newly discovered Shasta Pack in California, have also successfully departed from Eastern Oregon. Some, like OR-22 who was tragically shot by a coyote hunter in Malheur County, have not been so successful. And while a great deal of fanfare greets each new, dispersing wolf, the fact of the matter is that these announcements are too infrequent to guarantee more than a token Oregon wolf population.

Despite the tiny number of



Steve Pedery



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/AP File Photo
 This remote camera photo taken May 3, 2014, shows the wolf OR-7 on the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest in southwest Oregon.

wolves in the state, and the scarcity of the animals throughout all but a fraction of their suitable habitat, Oregon's Department of Fish and Wildlife is bowing to pressure from the Oregon Cattlemen's Association and other special interests to remove them from the state's endangered species list.

They are so eager to mollify a vocal minority and begin reducing protections for gray wolves that they have bypassed incorporating any independent scientific feedback into their plan, an important part of the delisting process and one required by law.

In defiance of Oregon's Endangered Species Act, the state also relies on wolf populations elsewhere to justify their plan. This rationalization is akin to saying there are plenty of coho salmon in Alaska, so it is acceptable to let them go extinct here.

Moreover, Oregon's Fish and Wildlife Commission is scheduled to both announce a plan and vote on it during a Monday meeting in Salem, circumventing important public feedback and process.

Oregon's wolves deserve better, and there is an opportunity here for leadership from Gov. Kate Brown. She should direct Fish and Wildlife to solicit a meaningful and independent scientific review of the delisting report. The agency must then

commit to reviewing that science and incorporating it, rather than moving ahead unilaterally despite legitimate criticisms from independent biologists. Bypassing scientific review only serves to delegitimize ODFW and its wildlife management work.

The governor should also call upon her wildlife commission to allow a full public process to play out before voting on a final delisting plan.

Wolves are only now regaining their rightful place as a fixture of Oregon's wilderness. Now is not the time to declare "mission accomplished" and turn our backs on their recovery. The success of Oregon's wolves to this point has relied on an adherence to science, public process, and the law. We are currently on a course that undermines all of these vital aspects.

If we are to make good on our sins of the past, to acknowledge wolves their place on the Oregon landscape and to allow future generations the fortune to hear the howl of a wild wolf from the rim of Crater Lake, we must commit ourselves to doing this right.

Steve Pedery is the conservation director for Oregon Wild, a conservation organization representing more than 16,000 members across the state and dedicated to protecting and restoring Oregon's wildlands, wildlife and waters as an enduring legacy for future generations.

That's my opinion! See you in sports

By JOE NOCERA
New York Times News Service

Opinions. That's what we do in Op-Ed: We render informed opinions that we hope are smart and sometimes provocative, backed up by good, old-fashioned shoe leather.

I'm heading off to a new assignment, and as I do, please indulge me as I toss off a few last opinions:

Few people are more anti-gun than Michael Bloomberg. And few people are wealthier. According to Forbes, Bloomberg is worth around \$40 billion, some of which he spends backing anti-gun candidates and supporting the advocacy group Everytown for Gun Safety. His success, though, has been limited.

How about another approach? I propose that he buy a gun company. Seriously. Smith & Wesson and Sturm, Ruger & Co. both have market capitalizations hovering around \$1 billion. Buying one would barely dent Bloomberg's wallet.

Owning a gun company would allow him to take a different kind of leadership role on issues like improving gun safety and imposing universal background checks. A Bloomberg-owned gun manufacturer could make a smart gun, for instance — that is, a gun that only its owner can use. Gun companies today won't sell them for fear of retaliation by the National Rifle Association. A Bloomberg-owned gun company has more potential to effect change in the country's gun culture than anything else I can think of.

I've written many columns about education, especially the effort, spearheaded by wealthy philanthropists, to "fix" public education by funding the charter school movement.

Paula McAvoy, the program direc-

tor for the Center for Ethics and Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison — and, I should note, my son Amato's fiancée — recently suggested a different idea: "Why don't they spend their money on infrastructure instead?"

Her point is that a broken-down school sends a powerful message to students: "Society doesn't care about your education." McAvoy added, "The place where you learn matters."

A new school sends the opposite message: that the country does care and wants public school students to succeed. A new school is also a huge morale booster, for students and teachers alike. "If you want to fix American education," McAvoy told me, aiming her remarks at education philanthropists, "how about setting a goal of putting every kid into a state-of-the-art school by the year 2025?"

Two of the best ideas I heard as an Op-Ed columnist:

Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute believes that Supreme Court justices should serve one 18-year term, and those terms should be staggered so that one expires every other year. That way, every president would be able to nominate two justices during a four-year term. What difference would this make? Few things have more poisoned our politics than battles over Supreme Court nominees, precisely because they are lifetime appointments. With term limits, the stakes would be lower when a seat is vacated, and maybe, just maybe, our political culture could start to heal.

William Wachtel, a New York lawyer and co-founder of the group Why Tuesday?, believes that elections should be held on the weekend, when



Joe Nocera

most people are not working, instead of Tuesdays, when they are. Tuesday voting, he likes to note, was originally built around farmers' schedules; today, it is nothing less than a form of discrimination. As I quoted Chris Rock when I wrote about this in 2013, "They don't want you to vote. If they did, we wouldn't vote on a Tuesday."

Why, oh, why won't the Metropolitan Opera perform "Porgy and Bess"? As I once noted in Sunday Review, it is the greatest American opera ever written, with a half-dozen of the finest songs George Gershwin ever composed. Its mostly black cast would help bring in a more diverse audience, something the Met could use. Whenever I've inquired whether Peter Gelb, the Met's general manager, is considering "Porgy and Bess," I'm told that he is — "in the future." The last time the Met performed it was a quarter-century ago. How much longer are we supposed to wait?

The late South African psychiatrist Mike Russell was among the first to note that smokers "smoke for nicotine, but they die from the tar." Meaning that while nicotine addicts smokers, it is the burning tobacco, with all of the carcinogens the smoke produces, that kills them. I've written a lot about e-cigarettes — maybe excessively so — because I think this point is so important. In demonizing e-cigarettes, the public health community has created a false equivalency between cigarettes and e-cigarettes, a stance I believe is costing lives. E-cigarettes may not be completely safe, but there is no doubt they could save lives if adult smokers could be encouraged to make the switch. And with that, I've had my last word on the subject.

I've enjoyed writing this column and I hope you've enjoyed reading it. Thank you for your many thoughtful responses, both pro and con. I'm looking forward to engaging with you again soon ... from the sports page.

Supreme Court justices should serve one 18-year term.