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It's about turning young lives around Astoria, Seaside districts could imitate the goal of South Jetty High School

One aspect of a newspaper's mission is to take its readers inside places they don't know about.

That is what Edward Stratton did last Wednesday with his report on South Jetty High School. In Warrenton near Costco, this state facility houses up to 50 young inmates. As Stratton noted this place is "mostly invisible to local residents."

One of the facility's core missions is to move inmates across the finish line to obtain a high school diploma. Its teachers are trained in a new program called Positive Human Development, which focuses on accountability.

The Warrenton School District runs South Jetty High School. Warrenton Grade School Librarian Kathy Merritt is one of the instructors.

In a State of the State speech some 25 years ago, Oregon Gov. Neil Goldschmidt talked about the massive prison-building program on which the state had em-

barked. We will build prisons, said Goldschmidt. But if that's all we do, they will always be full. That is one way of explaining the logic and the importance of a program like South Jetty High School. Education is one of the most important levers in moving toward a productive, non-criminal life.

By contrast, illiteracy is a criminal indicator. Thus, there is a significant link to Stratton's earlier story on the alarming rate of truancy in Clatsop County schools — especially among kindergarten students in Astoria and Seaside. A person of that age who misses foundational reading instruction starts school without the most basic learning tool.

Astoria and Seaside's school boards should give as much priority to curbing truancy as the state of Oregon is putting into South Jetty High School. Both strategies lead to the same place.

Time wasted waiting on Keystone kill

President Obama last week finally did something many felt he should and could have done near the start of his administration: He said no to the Keystone XL tar-sands oil pipeline between western Canada and refineries on the U.S. Gulf Coast.

Particularly during the months leading up to the 2012 presidential and 2014 congressional elections, the slowly oozing nature of this bureaucratic decision struck both supporters and opponents of the pipeline as brazen political cowardice. Clearly, a progressive Democrat would not give the go-ahead to a fossil-fuel project of such stellar symbolic importance.

Declining for so long to simply make this decision official was a matter of avoiding an election-year handicap for a handful of politicians — perhaps most notably Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., who lost her 2014 re-election bid despite vociferously defending Keystone on behalf of her energy-oriented state.

It is important to note that Keystone is not particularly important as either a great economic boon or as a potent villain in the struggle against climate change.

From the climate perspective, denying permits to one oil pipeline is the equivalent of hoping to stop the blight of heroin addiction by banning the sale of a hypodermic needle. The pipeline is merely one delivery system for oil; the private companies and economic forces that push for more fossil-fuel development will find other ways to get their product to market.

In fact, Joel Connelly of the Seattle P-I reported last week that the 800,000 barrels per day of Alberta tar sands that would have been carried by Keystone will like-

ly instead be piped within Canada to the British Columbia coast and then via tanker ship down through sensitive Pacific Northwest waters. Tanker traffic through Haro Strait between the San Juan and Gulf Islands could increase from five ships a month to 34.

It will be a Pyrrhic victory indeed if the U.S. notches an illusory climate win that someday results in a major oil spill in the Salish Sea.

Nor do Keystone advocates have much of a leg to stand on when they claim enormous job creation. After an admittedly welcome bump in jobs during pipeline construction, permanent employment gains have been estimated at a grand total of 35 nationwide for ongoing operation and maintenance.

Legitimate and substantial steps to begin limiting climate damage from burning fossil fuels has long been stymied by the manipulations of corporations and their servants in Congress, who deny anything is going wrong. The New York attorney general's investigation of ExxonMobil's alleged efforts to deliberately deceive the public is the beginning of the end of willful ignorance about the challenges we face from greenhouse gases created during traditional energy production.

Time wasted in an empty fight over Keystone XL should have been spent by the U.S. and Canada in developing real alternatives to burning tar-sand oil, American coal and other dirty fuels. Real leaders will quit playing games and immediately get busy with funding research and development of clean energy. It quite possibly can be done, but we can't afford to lose another moment.

Despair, in uniquely American style

By PAUL KRUGMAN
New York Times News Service

A couple of weeks ago President Obama Barack mocked Republicans who are "down on America," and reinforced his message by doing a pretty good Grumpy Cat impression.

He had a point: With job growth at rates not seen since the 1990s, with the percentage of Americans covered by health insurance hitting record highs, the doom-and-gloom predictions of his political enemies look ever more at odds with reality.

Yet there is a darkness spreading over part of our society. And we don't really understand why.

There has been a lot of comment, and rightly so, over a new paper by the economists Angus Deaton (who just won a Nobel) and Anne Case, showing that mortality among middle-aged white Americans has been rising since 1999. This deterioration took place while death rates were falling steadily both in other countries and among other groups in our own nation.

Even more striking are the proximate causes of rising mortality. Basically, white Americans are, in increasing numbers, killing themselves, directly or indirectly. Suicide is way up, and so are deaths from drug poisoning and the chronic liver disease that excessive drinking can cause. We've seen this kind of thing in other times and places — for example, in the plunging life expectancy that afflicted Russia after the fall of Communism. But it's a shock to see it, even in an attenuated form, in America.

Yet the Deaton-Case findings fit into a well-established pattern. There have been a number of studies showing that life expectancy for less-educated whites is falling across much of the nation. Rising suicides and overuse of opioids are known problems. And while pop-

ular culture may focus more on meth than on prescription painkillers or good old alcohol, it's not really news that there's a drug problem in the heartland.

But what's causing this epidemic of self-destructive behavior?

If you believe the usual suspects on the right, it's all the fault of liberals. Generous social programs, they insist, have created a culture of dependency and despair, while secular humanists have undermined traditional values. But (surprise!) this view is very much at odds with the evidence.

Rising mortality is a uniquely American phenomenon.

For one thing, rising mortality is a uniquely American phenomenon — yet America has both a much weaker welfare state and a much stronger role for traditional religion and values than any other advanced country. Sweden gives its poor far more aid than we do, and a majority of Swedish children are now born out of wedlock, yet Sweden's middle-aged mortality rate is only half of white America's.

You see a somewhat similar pattern across regions within the United States. Life expectancy is high and rising in the Northeast and California, where social benefits are highest and traditional values weakest. Meanwhile, low and stagnant or declining life expectancy is concentrated in the Bible Belt.

What about a materialist explanation? Is rising mortality a consequence of rising inequality and the hollowing out of the middle class?

Well, it's not that simple. We are,



Paul Krugman

after all, talking about the consequences of behavior, and culture clearly matters a great deal. Most notably, Hispanic Americans are considerably poorer than whites but have much lower mortality. It's probably worth noting, in this context, that international comparisons consistently find that Latin Americans have higher subjective

well-being than you would expect, given their incomes.

So what is going on? In a recent interview Deaton suggested that middle-aged whites have "lost the narrative of their lives." That is, their economic setbacks have hit hard because they expected better. Or to put it a bit differently, we're looking at people who were raised to believe in the American Dream, and are coping badly with its failure to come true.

That sounds like a plausible hypothesis to me, but the truth is that we don't really know why despair appears to be spreading across Middle America. But it clearly is, with troubling consequences for our society as a whole.

In particular, I know I'm not the only observer who sees a link between the despair reflected in those mortality numbers and the volatility of right-wing politics. Some people who feel left behind by the American story turn self-destructive; others turn on the elites they feel have betrayed them. No, deporting immigrants and wearing baseball caps bearing slogans won't solve their problems, but neither will cutting taxes on capital gains. So you can understand why some voters have rallied around politicians who at least seem to feel their pain.

At this point you probably expect me to offer a solution. But while universal health care, higher minimum wages, aid to education, and so on would do a lot to help Americans in trouble, I'm not sure whether they're enough to cure existential despair.

GOP should take the winnings and run

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER
Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — Where do Republicans get that special talent for turning gold to dust? They score an electoral "massacre" (*The Economist*) in 2014 and, a year later, what do they have to show for it other than another threat to shut down the government? Hillary Clinton is caught in email flagrante and Benghazi mendacity and yet, with one Kevin McCarthy gaffe and a singularly ineffective 11-hour Benghazi hearing, Republicans render her sanitized.



Charles Krauthammer

And now their latest feat. They win a stunning victory over their perennial nemesis, the mainstream media — a slam-dunk rim-rattling exposure of the media bias they have been complaining about for a half-century — and within a week they so overplayed their hand as to dissipate whatever sympathetic advantage they gained.

The CNBC debate was a gift for the GOP, so unadorned a demonstration of liberal condescension, hostility and arrogance that the rest of the media — their ideological cover exposed — were forced to denounce and ridicule their ham-handed colleagues. What happened then? Instead of quitting while they were ahead, the Republicans plunged into a week of meetings and statements, whining and complaining, bouncing around a series of demands, including control of the kind of questions that may or may not be asked at future debates.

Who's the genius who thought up that one? First, it instantly allowed the liberal media to turn the tables and play defenders of journalistic independence against GOP bullies.

Second, it made the Republicans look small. To paraphrase Chris Christie's "fantasy football" moment, the economy is in the tank, Russia is on the move, the Islamic State is on the attack — and the candidates are debating the proper room temperature for a debate fo-



Mark J. Terrill/AP Photo

Republican presidential candidates, from left, John Kasich, Mike Huckabee, Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, Donald Trump, Ben Carson, Carly Fiorina, and Ted Cruz take the stage during the CNBC Republican presidential debate at the University of Colorado, Oct. 28, in Boulder, Colo.

rum?

Third, this continues the season-long GOP diversion from what should be its real target — the wreckage wrought by seven years of Barack Obama. The greatest irony of this campaign is that Clinton and Bernie Sanders are the ones making the case that the economy is stagnant, inequality growing and the middle class falling increasingly behind. That's a devastating indictment of Democratic governance, exactly the case Republicans should have been making all year. Instead, they've wasted months trading schoolboy taunts and ad hominem.

Now another distraction: debate structure. The party is demanding there be no repetition of the CNBC debate. Why, for God's sake? That debate was the best thing to happen to the GOP since Michael Dukakis.

Won't someone tell the Republicans that they won? Let it go. Who cares who's on the next debate panel? Don't they realize that fear of ridicule alone will temper the instincts of whatever liberal questioners are chosen?

John Harwood's obnoxiousness and Becky Quick's incompetence earned most of the opprobrium heaped on the moderators' performance. But it was Carl Quintanilla who demonstrated just how unmoored liberal delusions about conservatives have become. He asked Ben Carson how, as an opponent of gay marriage, he could remain on the board of a company that is known for its generous treatment of

gay employees. Quintanilla seemed genuinely unable to fathom that one can oppose the most radical change in the structure of marriage in human history — as Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama all did just a few years ago — without wanting to see gay people persecuted and denied decent treatment by their employers.

CNBC produced the best night of the entire campaign season for the GOP. And yet some Republicans were determined to turn it into another theater of their civil war against the GOP "establishment." This time the target was Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus. As if Priebus is responsible for Harwood.

Good grief. Priebus' job, the party's job, is to control the number of debates and set the calendar. Its doing so in 2015-16 constitutes a significant achievement, considering the damage done to the GOP in 2011-2012 by its 20 freelance debates. That endless, vicious intramural fight — featuring Rick Perry and Newt Gingrich savaging Mitt Romney's "vulture capitalism" — laid the premise for Obama's negative and winning campaign.

Ted Cruz has suggested that Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Mark Levin moderate Republican debates. Good idea, wrong target. How about this arrangement? Limbaugh & Co. should moderate the *Democratic* debate. What a splendid blood-soaked spectacle that would be.

As for the GOP? Bring on the liberals. The Republicans should demand the return of Harwood, Quick and Quintanilla, until the end of time.

The CNBC debate was a gift for the GOP.