

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## Want a part-time job that earns \$174,000?

*Senators and congressmen will work two days per week in 2016*

Want a part-time job that earns \$174,000 with generous benefits and a killer pension? Run for Congress.

Writing Nov. 13, Dana Milbank of *The Washington Post* reported that Congress will meet only 111 days in 2016. That is two days per week. They will spend the rest of the year using their generous travel allowance to stay in touch with the rest of us.

There was a time when congressmen and senators came to Washington by car or train or even air, did their work over a sustained work period lasting months and then went home for various recesses, and especially in summer when Washington's heat is beastly.

Two things changed that. Central air conditioning and the commercial jet. Air conditioning made summer palatable. And the jet allowed members to come and go with impunity.

These days, congressmen love to crow about *not* living in Washington. No, indeed, they proclaim to prize their long weekends at home, being where the real people are. The problem is

that a deliberative body such as the House or Senate, only does business when it deliberates, in a chamber in Washington, D.C. But that's what these men and women seldom do these days.

Because of their frequent rush for the door, congressmen and senators lack the social relationships their predecessors enjoyed. Lacking real relationships, they treat each other like abstract objects. They have much deeper relationships with the narrowly-focused interest lobbies and ideological think tanks. They also have closer relationships with big campaign donors. And that brings us to the phenomenon of the permanent campaign season and year-round fundraising.

One of the best pieces of advice that any employee receives is to make yourself essential to your employer. The men and women of Congress have dug themselves a hole by not facing the pressing needs of the nation. They are inessential.

## It's in the dirt

Soil conservation is an issue most Americans never think about.

Many who do are likely to associate it only with dryland farming and the Dust Bowl. But it has always deserved to be a matter of concern in the Pacific Northwest — even here on the wet side, where splash dams once dumped thousands of years' accumulation of soil into rivers, lakes and bays.

A Facebook posting making the rounds in recent days is as true as it gets: "Man — despite his artistic pretensions, his sophistication, and his many accomplishments — owes his existence to a six inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains." Rain we still have in abundance in the Pacific Northwest; topsoil, too, but we must pay more attention to it.

Researchers speaking Nov. 4 at the Geological Society of America meeting in Baltimore draw strong connections between increasing wildfires in the West, soil erosion and water-quality concerns. As recently described by *Columbia Basin Bulletin*, "Wildfires, which are on the rise throughout the West as a result of prolonged drought and climate change, can alter soil properties and make it more vulnerable to erosion. A new study shows that the increase in wildfires may double soil erosion in some Western U.S. states by 2050, and all that dirt ends up in streams, clogging creeks and degrading water quality."

Scientific models predict erosion will increase by "at least 100 percent in a quarter of Western U.S. watersheds between the start of the 21st century and 2050, a surprisingly large increase in the amount of sediment to enter local streams. ... Two-thirds of Western

watersheds are projected to experience at least a 10 percent increase in erosion by the middle of the 21st century."

Much of this predicted erosion will happen in California — which still should worry us here, since much our food is grown there and since West Coast salmon seasons depend, in part, on the health of California watersheds.

However, fires in Oregon and Washington have a direct impact on water quality in our own region, degrading forestland, and fish and wildlife habitat. Eroded soil itself becomes a form of water pollution, containing minerals, nutrients and metals that can be toxic to fish and people. Dirt loosened by fires cover spawning areas in creeks and rivers, and prematurely fill reservoirs.

Researchers plan to do fine-scale mapping of erosion-prone areas; this may aid in preparing for how best to retain soil where it is supposed to be, instead of in rivers and reservoirs.

Beyond this, forestry policies must be fine-tuned to take fire danger and potential soil loss into account. In some places, logging can help avoid erosion from a future fire. More broadly, in national forests, much better thinning and maintenance is long overdue. Firefighting strategies may need refinements that place a premium on preserving soil for the future. U.S. Sens. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., and Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, are working on a worthwhile bipartisan bill that would improve communities' fire preparation and address fire prevention funding issues.

The public can help by realizing how much human success depends on good, healthy dirt.

## GUEST COLUMN

# Who you gonna call? 211info

By SUE CODY

*The Way to Wellville*

What if you suddenly lost your job and found you didn't have enough food to feed your family this month? Who would you call?

What if you needed help paying your bills or were in crisis and needed mental health services?

One call can take you to the nearest place to serve your needs. It is called 211info. It can be accessed by telephone, website, email, app or text. It is available in every Oregon county and Clark and Skamania counties in Washington.



Sue Cody

North Coast resident Sarah Brown is the community engagement coordinator for Clatsop, Tillamook and Columbia counties. She is updating the database and serves as the local contact for social service and health agencies.

"I am excited about partnering with Clatsop Community Action and other local agencies," Brown said. "There is so much need here and there is so much help available."

The 211info website offers the same information as the call center, which is located in Portland.

By telephone, the caller will be asked what kind of assistance is needed. With basic information about household zip code, occupants and income, people can learn if they qualify for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Women Infant and Children and other services.

"We assess needs immediately and see which programs people qualify for and if funds are available," Brown said.

On the website, under "Search," there is an extensive list of needs, such as:

- I am in crisis
- I need shelter
- I need food
- I need basic resources
- I need help paying bills
- I need transportation
- Youth mental health
- Abuse intervention

After choosing a need, the website helps the searcher define the specific type of assistance required.

For instance, if one chooses, "I need shelter," the next screen shows:

### 211info

Telephone: 211

Website: <http://211info.org>

Text: Send your zip code to 898211

Email: [info@211info.org](mailto:info@211info.org)

Providers may contact Brown at [sarah.brown@211info.org](mailto:sarah.brown@211info.org) or 503-440-6032.

- Domestic violence shelter
- Drop-in/day center
- Severe weather shelter
- Temporary shelter
- Transitional housing
- Youth shelter/housing

Choosing one of those options will lead to actual shelters with information on the name, address, hours of operation, phone number, website, distance from your location, email address, map, rules and regulations.

### Background

The 211 telephone number was approved by the Federal Communications Commission in 2000 to connect people to social services. It was implemented in the Portland metro area in 2004 and in 2009 expanded to include all 36 Oregon counties.

This year, the health care nonprofit CareOregon supplied a grant to hire a community engagement coordinator for the Northwest region. In this position, Brown's responsibility is to build relationships and coordinate efforts

with government, nonprofits, health care and other service providers to ease access to resources already in place.

"Calls peak around the holidays," Brown said. Statewide, between Oct. 1 and Dec. 31, 2014, there were 42,874 caller needs. In Clatsop, Tillamook and Columbia counties, there were 225 calls. Rental help was the most requested service, followed by shelter, electricity and SNAP assistance.

Statistics for the state and each region are available on the website under "Reports."

### Who is calling?

"Middle class people are calling; it's not just the homeless," Brown said. "Say you are suddenly out of a job, and for the time being you need assistance. Call 211. People there will tell you who to contact, who to call, when to apply and the best times to contact them."

"There is great need — especially in Clatsop County," Brown said. "It is not as visible or in your face, but the need is there. Assistance is available and we can point you in the right direction." The average call is only about 4 minutes long, Brown said.

Donations for assistance are accepted on the website. Donations support giving free referrals to health and social services, and a network of homeless service providers.

Sue Cody is the communications lead for Way to Wellville Clatsop County. [www.waytowellville.net](http://www.waytowellville.net)

## Finding peace within the holy texts

By DAVID BROOKS

*New York Times News Service*

It's easy to think that ISIS is some sort of evil, medieval cancer that somehow has resurfaced in the modern world.

The rest of us are pursuing happiness, and here comes this fundamentalist anachronism, spreading death.

But in his book "Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence," the brilliant Rabbi Jonathan Sacks argues that ISIS is in fact typical of what we will see in the decades ahead.

The 21st century will not be a century of secularism, he writes. It will be an age of desecularization and religious conflicts.

Part of this is simply demographic. Religious communities produce lots of babies and swell their ranks, while secular communities do not. The researcher Michael Blume looked back as far as ancient India and Greece and concluded that every nonreligious population in history has experienced demographic decline.

Humans also are meaning-seeking animals. We live, as Sacks writes, in a century that "has left us with a maximum of choice and a minimum of meaning." The secular substitutes for religion — nationalism, racism and political ideology — have all led to disaster. So many flock to religion, sometimes — especially within Islam — to extremist forms.

This is already leading to religious violence. In November 2014, just to take one month, there were 664 jihadi attacks in 14 countries, killing a total of 5,042 people. Since 1984, an estimated 1.5 million Christians have been killed by Islamist militias in Sudan.

Sacks emphasizes that it is not religion itself that causes violence.

In their book "Encyclopedia of Wars," Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod surveyed 1,800 conflicts and found that less than 10 percent had any religious component at all.

Rather, religion fosters groupishness, and the downside of groupishness is conflict with people outside the group. Religion can lead to thick moral communities, but in extreme forms it can also lead to what Sacks calls pathological dualism, a mentality that divides the world between those who are unimpeachably good and those who are irredeemably bad.

The pathological dualist can't reconcile his humiliated place in the world with his own moral superiority. He embraces a politicized religion — restoring the caliphate — and seeks to destroy those outside his group by apocalyptic force. This leads to acts of what Sacks calls altruistic evil, or acts of terror in which the self-sacrifice involved somehow is thought to confer the right to be merciless and unfathomably cruel.

That's what we saw in Paris last week. Sacks correctly argues that we need military weapons to win the war against fanatics like ISIS, but we need ideas to establish a lasting peace. Secular thought or moral relativism are unlikely to offer any effective rebuttal. Among religious people, mental shifts will be found by reinterpreting the holy texts themselves. There has to be a Theology of the Other: a complex biblical understanding of how to see God's face in strangers. That's what Sacks sets out to do.

The great religions are based on love, and they satisfy the human need for community. But love is problematic. Love is preferential and particular. Love excludes and can create rivalries. Love of one scripture can make it hard to enter sympathetic-



David Brooks

ly into the minds of those who embrace another.

The Bible is filled with sibling rivalries: Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his brothers. The Bible crystallizes the truth that people sometimes find themselves competing for parental love and even competing for God's love.

Read simplistically, the Bible's sibling rivalries seem merely like stories of victory or defeat — Isaac over Ishmael. But all three Abraham religions have sophisticated, multilayered interpretive traditions that undercut fundamentalist readings.

Alongside the ethic of love there is a command to embrace an ethic of justice. Love is particular, but justice is universal. Love is passionate, justice is dispassionate.

Justice demands respect of the other. It plays on the collective memory of people who are in covenantal communities: Your people, too, were once vulnerable strangers in a strange land.

The command is not just to be empathetic toward strangers, which is fragile. The command is to pursue sanctification, which involves struggle and sometimes conquering your selfish instincts. Moreover, God frequently appears where he is least expected — in the voice of the stranger — reminding us that God transcends the particulars of our attachments.

The reconciliation between love and justice is not simple, but for believers the texts, read properly, point the way. Sacks' great contribution is to point out that the answer to religious violence is probably going to be found within religion itself, among those who understand that religion gains influence when it renounces power.

It may seem strange that in this century of technology, peace will be found within these ancient texts. But as Sacks points out, Abraham had no empire, no miracles and no army — just a different example of how to believe, think and live.

**Your people, too, were once vulnerable strangers in a strange land.**