

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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A glance back, a wish forward

New library, crisis respite center, Port progress in view

On this fourth day of 2016, here are our ambitions for the year and our gratitude for accomplishments of 2015.

1. Contrary to some futuristic talk, libraries are not dead in the era of digitized information. In places like Seattle and Seaside, they are thriving as community centers in contemporary settings.

We could have that here. The prospect of a new or refurbished Astoria library has been studied and discussed at some length. It is time for the Astoria City Council to agree upon an option and move forward.

2. We are grateful for creation of the Astoria Warming Center. City Councilor Drew Herzig deserves credit for giving visibility to this need. Two institutions — Grace Episcopal Church and First United Methodist Church — have been essential to the warming center.

3. Like the homeless, the mentally ill seldom rank high on a community's priorities. That's why the crisis respite center, planned for construction in Warrenton, is a major step forward for our region. Instead of housing mentally ill persons in jail, this center will be an option. Clatsop County Sheriff Tom Bergin commendably made this concept a priority.

4. Driving by the Chinook School and seeing its great paint job is a pleasure. Going inside the restored gymnasium for an event is heartening — especially when actors from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival make an appearance. Work remains to be done on the school. If history is any guide, the organizers of the restoration campaign will get it done.

5. The Port of Astoria has trained us over many years to expect travail, controversy and failure. But in 2015 there was progress. The Port finally pulled the plug on one of its most disastrous decisions — to install Brad Smithart at the decrepit former Red Lion property. After months of forensic accounting, the Port has financial numbers it can rely upon. It is also clearing up its list of lawsuits. Executive Director Jim Knight has displayed a competence and steadiness not seen in his immediate predecessors. He has withstood the pull of the predictable periodic pointless outbursts of some Port commissioners. Our wish for 2016: more progress, please.

6. Succession is everything. At the beginning of 2015 we celebrated the enormous accomplishments of Willis Van Dusen's more than 20 years of civic leadership. Then the new council, led by Mayor Arline LaMear took office. One of its early acts was to end the fractious debate over the jurisdiction of drunken-driving cases, sending all the city's cases to Circuit Court.

7. One of 2015's most heartening developments in Astoria was Greg Newenhof's acquisition of the dilapidated Flavel home at 15th Street and Franklin Avenue. As co-proprietor of City Lumber, Newenhof is the perfect person for this immense challenge. He has the tools and he knows how to access all of the expertise in town.

8. Conversely, it is disappointing that the Flavel property on Commercial Street has not found a buyer. As we reported last Thursday, the recent auction did not yield an adequate bid. We hope this will not deter the conservator and the city from finding a solution to a rundown block in the heart of downtown.



Mayor Arline LaMear

9. On our wish list for 2014 was, "An immigration bill, please." Knowing that U.S. House Republicans don't see this as essential business, especially for their friends in agriculture, we realize it is a pipe dream to expect an immigration solution in 2016. But the deeper fear is that with congressional Republicans, it will never be time for progress on immigration.

10. The U.S. Coast Guard's decision to base Sector Columbia River at the river's mouth has been a ringing success for an agency vital to our safety and economic well-being. We continue to hope for a favorable decision to base two new 154-foot Sentinel-class fast response cutters here. Astoria, Warrenton and Ilwaco are Coast Guard towns. Let's keep it that way.

11. A regionwide shortage of affordable housing — keynoted by historically low rental vacancy rates — is harming the finances of families and has the potential of hobbling our economic prospects. We need effective collaboration between developers, lenders and agencies to add new single-family and multiple-family dwellings in ways that respond to needs without violating the still-important goals of growth management. Accommodating more residents without sprawling over important farmland, forests and open spaces will be one of the Pacific Northwest's biggest challenges in the 21st century.

12. It is time for Oregon and Washington state fisheries managers to acknowledge that commercial gillnetting on the Columbia River is an environmentally responsible way to provide consumers with local salmon. Hypothetical alternatives like seine nets have not been shown to lower wild salmon mortality, nor have off-channel net-pen fisheries proven up to the job of replacing gillnet drifts on the main river. The gillnet ban was an impulsive decision by a distracted and now-disgraced governor. It should be abandoned.

13. Thanks to a provocative story in *The New Yorker*, 2015 was the year the general public learned about the Cascadia Subduction Zone and understood its potential to generate massive earthquakes and tsunamis. In our area, Cannon Beach has long been a leader in preparing for this disaster, practicing evacuation routes, caching supplies on high ground and generally planning how to survive. All coastal and estuary communities should follow Cannon Beach's example in 2016.



Jim Knight

Test your savvy about 2016 with a quick quiz

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF
New York Times News Service

Those of us engaged in columny usually settle for writing about what has already happened. But today, let's not follow the easy course.

Instead, take my quiz of what's to come in the year ahead and see if we think alike.

1. At the end of 2016, Donald Trump caused a stir by ...

A. Preparing for his presidential inauguration by renaming the White House "Trump Palace."

B. Raising funds to renovate the Statue of Liberty so that its arms move, waving immigrants away.

C. Actually, no stir at all. After being crushed in the presidential race, he has been quietly trying to repair business relations with Mexicans, Muslims, women — well, with everybody.

2. In the Republican presidential race ...

A. Ted Cruz built on his Iowa caucuses victory to make further gains on Super Tuesday and win the nomination.

B. The failure of any candidate to win enough delegates led the convention to draft House Speaker Paul D. Ryan.

C. Marco Rubio overcame his failure to win either Iowa or New Hampshire to narrowly win the nomination.

3. Hillary Clinton ...

A. Dropped out of the race after a series of scandals, and a last-ditch effort to draft Joe Biden came too late. Bernie Sanders won the Democratic nomination and became America's first democratic socialist president after Ted Cruz split GOP votes with the independent candidacy of Donald Trump.

B. Easily won the Democratic nomination but then lost in November as Sen. Marco Rubio and his running mate, John Kasich, portrayed her as a crony capitalist

whose time had passed.

C. Became the first woman elected president.

4. In Russia, President Vladimir Putin ended 2016 ...

A. By appearing in a television documentary riding bare-chested across Siberia on a dragon borrowed from "Game of Thrones."

B. By dispatching provocateurs to instigate unrest in Estonia, then dispatching troops "to protect Russian lives" there. NATO responded by holding meetings.

C. By crushing growing anti-government demonstrations across Russia.

5. President Barack Obama's 2016 Syria strategy consisted of ...

A. Persuading Sunni Arab countries to battle the Islamic State in conjunction with Kurdish forces.

B. Reluctantly dispatching 10,000 ground troops into northern Syria to destroy the Islamic State capital, Raqqa.

C. Really? You think he has a Syria strategy?

6. Regarding Obamacare, in 2016 ...

A. Republicans voted 23 more times to repeal Obamacare, making it a major theme of the 2016 campaign.

B. The unpopularity of fines for lack of insurance made it a growing embarrassment to the Democratic Party.

C. Amid evidence of its success, Republican candidates dropped the subject.

7. In response to the Black Lives Matter movement ...

A. Princeton University announced that it would rename the Woodrow Wilson School and invited bids for naming rights. Donald Trump bought them.

B. Not much happened: Attention switched to the presidential race.

C. After the election, Obama



Nicholas Kristof

announced the formation of a National Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

8. Chinese-U.S. relations ...

A. Were set back after a naval clash in the South China Sea near the Spratly Islands.

B. Deteriorated because of President Xi Jinping's nationalist policies in the South China Sea and oppressive human rights policies at home.

C. Improved because undetected Chinese government hackers wrote glowingly about China in the President's Daily Brief.

9. The technological breakthrough of 2016 was ...

A. The Amazon-Uber joint venture to send a drone to pick you up and carry you to your destination.

B. The spread of bloodstream bots that roam your arteries and veins, looking for cancer cells to destroy.

C. The formation of a company to operate self-driving taxis.

10. The refugee crisis

...
 A. Ameliorated as Europe guarded its borders more tightly.

B. Deteriorated but received less attention as Europe bribed Turkey to curb the passage of refugees to Greece and make the problem less visible.

C. Worsened as hundreds of thousands of Iranians, Nigerians, Ethiopians, Afghans and others left for Germany.

11. Democracy ...

A. Was the title of a smash Broadway show about early America by Lin-Manuel Miranda, who also created "Hamilton."

B. Retreated in central Africa, as leaders of Burundi, Rwanda and Congo all tried to cling to power.

C. Came to Belarus, often described as the last dictatorship in Europe.

ANSWERS: We'll see in a year how we all did. My choice for the first six is C; for the remainder it's B. May our hopes be realized and our fears prove unwarranted. And happy new year to all my readers!

We'll see in a year how we all did.

Privilege, pathology and power

By PAUL KRUGMAN
New York Times News Service

Wealth can be bad for your soul. That's not just a hoary piece of folk wisdom; it's a conclusion from serious social science, confirmed by statistical analysis and experiment. The affluent are, on average, less likely to exhibit empathy, less likely to respect norms and even laws, more likely to cheat, than those occupying lower rungs on the economic ladder.

And it's obvious, even if we don't have statistical confirmation, that extreme wealth can do extreme spiritual damage. Take someone whose personality might have been merely disagreeable under normal circumstances, and give him the kind of wealth that lets him surround himself with sycophants and usually get whatever he wants. It's not hard to see how he could become almost pathologically self-regarding and unconcerned with others.

So what happens to a nation that gives ever-growing political power to the superrich?

Modern America is a society in which a growing share of income and wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small number of people, and these people have huge political influence — in the early stages of the 2016 presidential campaign, around half the contributions came from fewer than 200 wealthy families. The usual concern about this march toward oligarchy is that the interests and policy preferences of the very rich are quite different from those of the population at large, and that is surely the biggest problem.

But it's also true that those empowered by money-driven politics include a disproportionate number of spoiled egomaniacs. Which brings me to the current election cycle.

The most obvious illustration of



Paul Krugman

the point I've been making is the man now leading the Republican field. Donald Trump would probably have been a blowhard and a bully whatever his social station. But his billions have insulated him

from the external checks that limit most people's ability to act out their narcissistic tendencies; nobody has ever been in a position to tell him, "You're fired!" And the result is the face you keep seeing on your TV.

But Trump isn't the only awesomely self-centered billionaire playing an outsized role in the 2016 campaign.

There have been some interesting news reports lately about Sheldon Adelson, the Las Vegas gambling magnate. Adelson has been involved in some fairly complex court proceedings, which revolve around claims of misconduct in his operations in Macau, including links to organized crime and prostitution. Given his business, this may not be all that surprising. What was surprising was his behavior in court, where he refused to answer routine questions and argued with the judge, Elizabeth Gonzales. That, as she rightly pointed out, isn't something witnesses get to do.

Then Adelson bought Nevada's largest newspaper. As the sale was being finalized, reporters at the paper were told to drop everything and start monitoring all activity of three judges, including Gonzales. And while the paper never published any results from that investigation, an attack on Gonzales, with what looks like a fictitious byline, did appear in a small Connecticut newspaper owned by one of Adelson's associates.

OK, but why do we care? Because Adelson's political spending has made him a huge player in Republican politics — so much so that reporters routinely talk about the

So what happens to a nation that gives ever-growing political power to the superrich?

"Adelson primary," in which candidates trek to Las Vegas to pay obeisance.

Are there other cases? Yes indeed, even if the egomania doesn't rise to Adelson levels. I find myself thinking, for example, of hedge-fund billionaire Paul Singer, another big power in the GOP, who published an investor's letter declaring that inflation was running rampant — he could tell from the prices of Hamptons real estate and high-end art. Economists got some laughs out of the incident, but think of the self-absorption required to write something like that without realizing how it would sound to non-billionaires.

Or think of the various billionaires who, a few years ago, were declaring with straight faces, and no sign of self-awareness, that President Barack Obama was holding back the economy by suggesting that some businesspeople had misbehaved. You see, he was hurting their feelings.

Just to be clear, the biggest reason to oppose the power of money in politics is the way it lets the wealthy rig the system and distort policy priorities. And the biggest reason billionaires hate Obama is what he did to their taxes, not their feelings. The fact that some of those buying influence are also horrible people is secondary.

But it's not trivial. Oligarchy, rule by the few, also tends to become rule by the monstrously self-centered. Narcissocracy? Jerkocracy? Anyway, it's an ugly spectacle, and it's probably going to get even uglier over the course of the year ahead.