

Free tuition

Both my children were good students in high school. They both got good grades, got a few scholarships, and have gone to universities in Oregon. Nevertheless, when they get done with college, they will have tens of thousands of dollars of debt that they (and my wife and I) will have to pay back.

Despite their scholarships, and despite what my wife and I have been able to pay for their college, it is so expensive that very few students can get through school without taking on loans. In fact, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, student loan debt is second only to mortgage debt in the U.S., with the average student owing over \$24,000. This just shouldn't be.

If my kids happened to grow up in Germany, or if we decided to move to Germany, things would be very different for them. The BBC wrote in June of last year that, "While the cost of college education in the U.S. has reached record highs, Germany has abandoned tuition fees altogether for German and international students alike. An increasing number of Americans are taking advantage and saving tens of thousands of dollars to get their degrees."

Do we value a university education in America or not? A lot has been said about how the U.S. is continuing to slip backwards in the area of science and mathematics at the college level. Our skyrocketing tuition fees can only make matters worse.

Something has to be done to bring the cost of a college education under control. Every American young man and woman who has the ability and the ambition should be able to afford a college education, and should be able to leave the university on graduation day debt free. How can this be done?

In the first place, we can make all state colleges tuition free. Students would still have to compete to get into the best colleges, but once they are admitted, they would not have to pay for tuition, books, or fees, and the cost of housing would

Keep church and state separate

It seems that today, more than ever, we need to keep in mind the importance of keeping church and state separate. For example, Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore recently directed probate judges not to issue marriage licenses, contrary to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*; access to birth control is being curtailed for religious reasons; displays of the Ten Commandments in public buildings is not uncommon, and I could site many more examples.

Arguments for and against church/state separation generally hinge on quotes from our founding fathers; some supported separation, while others not so much. I argue that regard-

less of what our founders had in mind, keeping the two institutions separate is best for both sides.

Our country is much more religiously diverse today than it was in the past. At the time of our country's founding there were very few non-Christians. Today in the U.S. there are close to three million Muslims, over two million Buddhists and over two million Hindus, over six million Jews, and, according to Pew about 5 percent of American citizens are atheists.

With such religious diversity it is imperative that church and state remain separate, so that religious liberties are guaranteed for everyone —

not just the majority religion.

When Americans claim that the U.S. is a Christian nation, they are denying the existence of a large segment of our population. Members of minority religions are relegated as outsiders and are here only because they are tolerated. This mindset does not bring Americans together; rather, it keeps us apart.

It is imperative that this ideal of church/state separation be maintained so we are able to pass this ideal on to future generations — because without vigilance, this precious wisdom will be diluted and eventually lost.

ED JOYCE
Astoria

be greatly reduced. Yes, this would mean we, as a society, would have to make sacrifices in other areas, but for decades now higher education has been getting the short straw, while things like defense and Social Security soak up the bulk of the U.S. budget.

According to the Pentagon, the budget for the Department of Defense is close to \$700 billion, including about \$6.4 billion for a single aircraft carrier. Yes, we need a strong defense in our country, but we also need a strong future for our young people. They can't have that if they are saddled with debt.

DON ANDERSON
Astoria

Health concerns

During 2012, health care representatives held town hall meetings in Astoria. As we begin 2016, I want to encourage our community to reinstate these meetings. While the new health care laws have benefited many, there are still many challenges.

Health insurance companies can choose to offer insurance in Clatsop County, and decide what premiums they offer. We have fewer health insurance choices, and in some cases pay over \$1,000 more than other Oregonians. We have doctors who have long waiting periods for new

patients, and many want to know what insurance you have before they will consider you as a patient. Worse yet is choosing not to get health insurance, as many doctors and clinics will not see a patient unless they have insurance.

Recently, I was helping a client apply for health insurance, as he had an immediate health need. I was able to get him health insurance, but his application still needed to be finalized. While he was waiting for the insurance company to complete this process, he went to the hospital emergency room with documents showing he would soon have insurance. He was sent home with a prescription, where he died a couple days later. I often wonder if the results would have been the same if he had walked into the hospital with a health insurance card.

I believe we can make a difference in our health insurance, physician and health care options. We need to find out why the insurance companies are choosing not to offer their programs in Clatsop County and for some, why the premiums are higher. We need to understand why we don't have more physicians to satisfy the growing health care needs, and we need to be informed about our options.

I will invite representatives from the health insurance

companies to a local town hall meeting this spring. I am hoping others will also invite representatives to other town hall meetings. For the rest of the community, please attend these meetings and ask questions. As a community working together, maybe we can improve health care in Clatsop County.

For the community members, who still do not have health insurance, please complete an application by Jan. 31, or you may be without insurance until Jan. 1 next year.

LINDA DUGAN
Astoria

Gaea's epilogue

Most adult human beings alive on planet Earth now will most likely not suffer the severe ravages of worsening climate change, perhaps consoling themselves that they will be dead before it really kicks in — yet perceiving death as the only escape is probably not a satisfactory consolation. And, the prospect of each generation being aware the world will be a more dreadful place to live in for each succeeding generation is not much comfort, either.

Although there is a tremendous political rift in the U.S. about global warming, the real critical partisan di-

vide might be between generations; the more passive elderly who will quit the planet soon, versus the young who want to reverse the probability of a harrowing future now, before it is too late.

Another division is whether climate change is anthropogenic (human caused) or simply a recurrent natural cycle.

So we had a United Nations conference on climate change (No. 21) in Paris, another in a succession of gaudy pageants (resembling a Star Wars bar) that are more or less emblematic of another great human schism: the disparity between the scornful deceit of power and debilitating impotence of poverty.

It would seem a central purpose of these conferences has been the opportunity for those who cause and benefit most from environmental destruction of the planet to ensure the consequences fall upon those least responsible and most vulnerable. At least global warming was tacitly acknowledged by the principle perpetrators at Paris.

An inexcusable omission is the failure to ensure an equal ratio between women and men as delegates to any of these climate change conclaves. Women's representation should be a fundamental priority — after all, men are the major culprits responsi-

ble for the impending global catastrophe that threatens human continuance on this planet. It seems likely that women were the real pioneers of the cultivation of grains and domestication of animals that led to the agricultural revolution that produced civilization.

The focal priority of this new century/millennium is to complete the public and personal equality of women. It is the essential basic correction for humanity to make, as well as the most potent force to successfully fulfill the myriad other progressive changes — which indeed includes foremost the reversal of our present course toward extinction on planet Gaea.

If we who are alive now do not sincerely sweat blood to mitigate this dismal trend, our climate distressed descendants will quite likely despise us for cravenly yielding to short-term self-interest. They will probably wish an eternal hell for us to parallel their living hell on Earth.

MICHAEL PAUL
McCUSKER
Waldport

Not the right woman

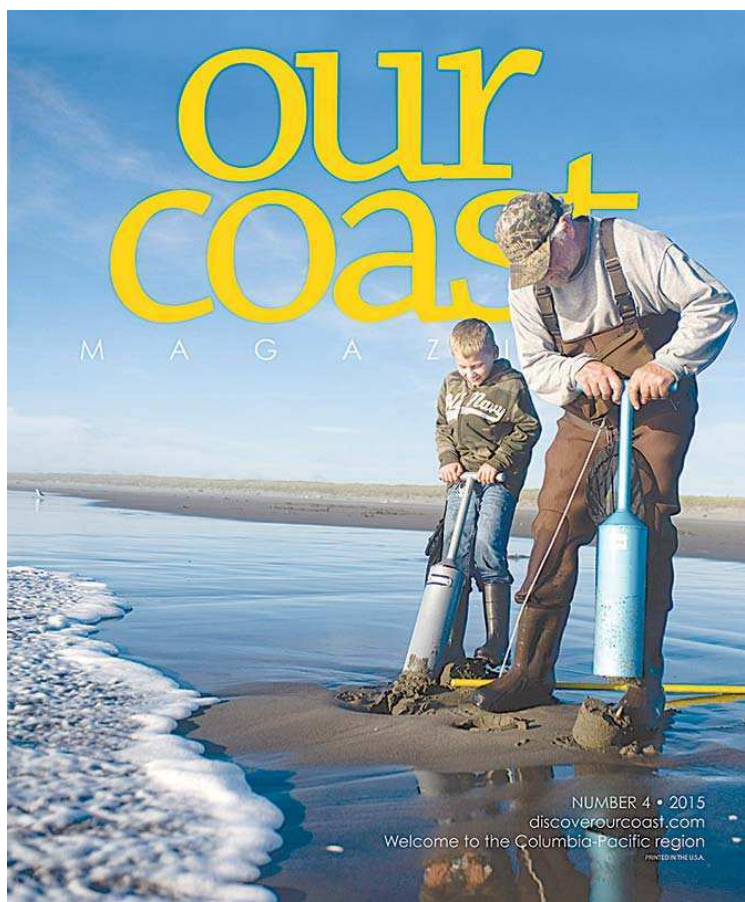
If, in 1998, Bill Clinton would have resigned over his affair with a young White House intern, then Al Gore would have taken his place and would have become our president. In time, Gore would have lost the nerdy tag and folks would have come to love and trust him.

He would have easily beaten George W. Bush. There would have been no illegal attack on Iraq by our country, which most Americans vehemently opposed. We would not have become the catalyst for most of the unrest and violence that exists in the Middle East since that time.

I think the Clintons have worn out their welcome at the White House.

I am a progressive Democratic woman who has been waiting all my life for a woman president. That woman is not Hillary Clinton.

MARY TANGUAY
WEBB
Astoria



“Our Coast... we received the magazine with our picture in it today...thank you so much for sending this issue to us!”

I have to admit I don't think I have seen your magazine before...I guess because we aren't tourists and really don't go to motels or restaurants. Our favorite dinner out is a sunset beach fire with friends, a yummy dinner, wine and s'mores for dessert.

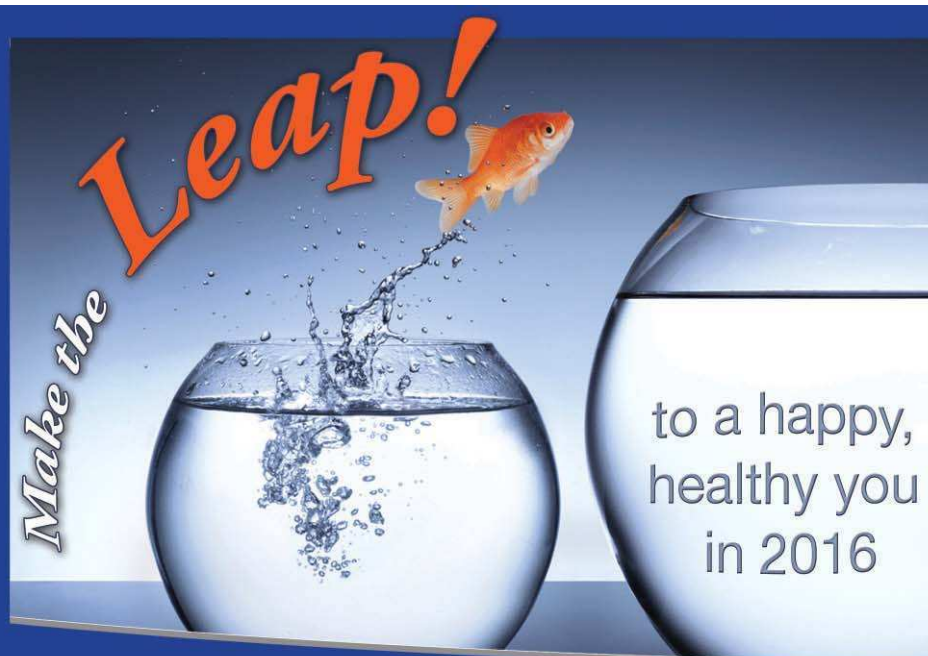
Be assured we will look for the magazine in February...the production is top quality with relevant articles about the beautiful Oregon coast... Thank you again!”

Debbie Marshall

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