

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## Call before you dig

*Good public service is more than just reliable lights*

The Pacific County (Wash.) Public Utility District's decision to replace aging power poles in an extraordinarily sensitive Chinook Indian cultural site is explainable in only one way: It's how it's always been done. Which is to say PUD management moves ahead with utter confidence in its own judgment, without adequate reference to nonutilitarian considerations.

In one way, this is understandable. Considering the weather's violence in a heavily forested region, the reliability of electrical service is commendable. PUD managers and crews are remarkably well paid by local standards, but most Pacific County residents don't begrudge them the money. Few people have skills to run a utility or the bravery and fortitude it takes to maintain power in all hours and conditions.

With full credit for all it does well, the PUD was clumsy and tone deaf in its actions and subsequent explanations concerning the Chinook Middle Village site.

PUD management knew the site contained human remains; its personnel were present when they were discovered, most recently finding some during a stalled 2011 effort to bury power lines. The site will soon formally become National Park Service property. The above-ground interpretive exhibits and walkways there were constructed following delicate negotiations with Chinook descendants. All this is public record or can be learned with a phone call.

Middle Village has been identified as the likely summer

residence of Chief Comcomly, who greeted Lewis and Clark and went on to play a key roll in the fur trade. Though not a traditional cemetery for the Chinook, it in effect became one as their civilization collapsed with the arrival of European diseases. It is holy ground and a site of potent significance. That the U.S. government doesn't currently say the Chinook meet every technical legal standard for official tribal status is immaterial. They are our neighbors. We know their history. We know they exist. It isn't "political correctness" to expect Pacific County PUD to exercise good manners in accordance with this knowledge.

This is the latest strong evidence that when elected Pacific County PUD commissioners move to hire a new general manager upon the retirement of Doug Miller, they must include the public and expand their search beyond current staff. Yes, county residents want the lights to stay on. But they also expect all public employees to behave as public servants in the 21st century, making a thorough effort to include all stakeholders in making decisions.

## What shall we learn from Flint's bad water?

Flint, Michigan, is a Rorschach test. The lessons people take away form the city's polluted drinking water stem from their own perspectives. *The New York Times* examined emails from the governor's office, sees massive indifference and notes that if these complaints came from a white, affluent community there would have been immediate remedy. *The Wall Street Journal's* editorial page sees a cascade of bad choices, beginning with a Flint's fateful error.

Matt Latimer, a speechwriter to President George W. Bush, is baffled at Republican presidential candidates' silence ("Republicans ignore a poisoned city").

If this were a biblical parable, how would it be named? The heedless elders and the poisoned children?

Nothing is more basic to our lives than water and air — clean water and clean air. It is astounding that some industries and some politicians (doing

their bidding) believe they can degrade the definition of clean water.

Another recent parable involving dirty water was DuPont's poisonous runoff into a West Virginia stream. That drew the legal action of a corporate lawyer named Rob Bilott. Thanks to the *Times* headline writer, that biblical parable is "The lawyer who became DuPont's worst nightmare."

In the upside-down politics of 2016, in which conservatives are anything but that, we who reside far from the power centers — as did the people of Flint — must look out for our health and welfare. At the mouth of the Columbia River, we sort of learned that when former Gov. John Kitzhaber changed policy in order to wipe out a historically legitimate industry.

The lesson of Flint is that a community may no longer expect government leaders and bureaucrats to protect the most basic elements of their health.

# The anxieties of impotence

By DAVID BROOKS  
*New York Times News Service*

In 1936 George Orwell wrote a magnificent essay called *Shooting an Elephant*. Orwell had been working as a British police officer in Burma, enforcing colonial rule. An elephant had gone "must," broken its chains, trampled some homes and killed a man.

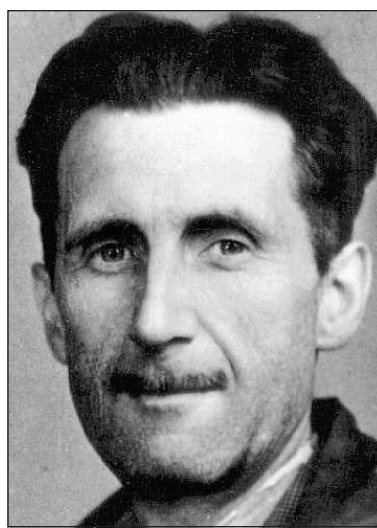
As Orwell walked, gun in hand, toward the elephant, a crowd of more than 2,000 Burmese gathered behind him. They hated him, but it would be a diverting spectacle to see an elephant shot and they could use the meat. Orwell didn't want to shoot the poor creature, whose "must," or frenzied state, had passed and who was peacefully eating grass. But he felt the pressure of the crowd behind him. They'd laugh at him if he didn't kill the thing.

"I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind," Orwell wrote. And so he subjected the animal to a long and agonizing death.

In his essay nobody feels like they have any power. The locals, the imperial victims, sure didn't. Orwell, the guy with the gun, didn't feel like he had any. The imperialists back in London were too far away.

That's sort of the way much of the world is today. As Anand Giridharadas writes in *The International New York Times*, "If anything unites America in this fractious moment it is a widespread sentiment that power is somewhere other than where you are."

The Republican establishment thinks the grass roots have the power but the grass roots think the reverse. The unions think the corporations have the power but the corporations think the startups do. Regulators think Wall Street has the power but Wall Street thinks the regulators do. The Pew Research Center asked Americans,



George Orwell

**There's no all-controlling Wizard of Oz to slay.**

"Would you say your side has been winning or losing more?" Sixty-four percent of Americans, with majorities of both parties, believe their side has been losing more.

These days people seem to underestimate their own power or suffer from what Giridharadas calls the "anxiety of impotence."

Sometimes when groups feel oppressed, they organize by coming up with concrete reform proposals to empower themselves. The Black Lives Matter movement is doing this.

But in other cases the feeling of absolute powerlessness can corrupt absolutely. As psychological research has shown, many people who feel powerless come to feel unworthy, and become complicit in their own oppression. Some exaggerate the weight and size of the obstacles in front of them. Some feel dehumanized, forsaken, doomed and guilty.

Today we live in a world of isolation and atomization, where people distrust their own institutions. In such circumstances many people respond to powerlessness with pointless acts of self-destruction.

In the Palestinian territories, for example, young people don't organize or work with their government to improve their prospects. They wander into Israel, try to stab a soldier or a pregnant woman and get shot or arrested — every single time. They throw away their lives for a pointless and usually botched

moment of terrorism.

In a different way, the American election has been perverted by feelings of powerlessness.

Americans are beset by complex, intractable problems that don't have a clear villain: technological change displaces workers; globalization and the rapid movement of people destabilize communities; family structure dissolves; the political order in the Middle East teeters, the Chinese economy craters, inequality rises, the global order frays, etc.

To address these problems we need big, responsible institutions (power centers) that can mobilize people, cobble together governing majorities and enact plans of actions. In the U.S. context that means functioning political parties and a functioning Congress.

Those institutions have been weakened of late. Parties have been rendered weak by both campaign finance laws and the Citizens United decision, which have cut off their funding streams and given power to polarized super-donors who work outside the party system. Congress has been weakened by polarization and disruptive members who don't believe in legislating.

Instead of shoring up these institutions, many voters are inclined to make everything worse. Plagued by the anxiety of impotence many voters are drawn to leaders who pretend that our problems could be solved by defeating some villain. Donald Trump says stupid elites are the problem. Ted Cruz says it's the Washington cartel. Bernie Sanders says it's Wall Street.

The fact is, for all the problems we may have with Wall Street or Washington, our biggest problems are systemic — the disruptions caused by technological progress and globalization, mass migration, family breakdown and so on. There's no all-controlling Wizard of Oz to slay.

If we're to have any hope of addressing big systemic problems we'll have to repair big institutions and have functioning parties and a functioning Congress. We have to discard the anti-political, anti-institutional mood that is prevalent and rebuild effective democratic power centers.

This requires less atomization and more collective action, fewer strongmen but greater citizenship. It requires the craft of political architecture, not the demagoguery of destruction.

## GOP gets Iran prisoner swap wrong

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER  
*Washington Post Writers Group*

WASHINGTON — Give President Obama credit. His Iran nuclear deal may be disastrous but the packaging was brilliant.

The near-simultaneous prisoner exchange was meant to distract from last Saturday's official implementation of the sanctions-lifting deal.

And it did. The Republicans concentrated almost all their fire on the swap sideshow.

And in denouncing the swap, they were wrong. True, we should have made the prisoner release a precondition for negotiations. But that pre-emptive concession was made long ago (among many others, such as granting Iran in advance the right to enrich uranium). The remaining question was getting our prisoners released before we gave away all our leverage upon implementation of the nuclear accord. We did.

Republicans say: We shouldn't negotiate with terror states. But we do and we should. How else do you get hostages back? And yes, of course negotiating encourages further hostage taking. But there is always something to be gained by kidnapping Americans. This swap does not affect that truth one way or the other.

And here, we didn't give away much. The seven released Iranians, none of whom has blood on his hands, were sanctions busters (and a hacker), and sanctions are essentially over now. The slate is clean.

But how unfair, say the critics. We released prisoners duly convicted in a court of law. Iran released

perfectly innocent, unjustly jailed hostages.

Yes, and so what? That's just another way of saying we have the rule of law, they don't. It doesn't mean we abandon our hostages. Natan Sharansky was a prisoner of conscience who spent eight years in the Gulag on totally phony charges. He was exchanged for two real Soviet spies. Does anyone think we should have said no?

The one valid criticism of the Iranian swap is that we left one, perhaps two, Americans behind and unaccounted for. True. But the swap itself was perfectly reasonable. And cleverly used by the administration to create a heartwarming human interest story to overshadow a rotten diplomatic deal, just as the Alan Gross release sweetened a Cuba deal that gave the store away to the Castro brothers.

The real story of Saturday, Jan. 16, 2016 — "Implementation Day" of the Iran deal — was that it marks a historic inflection point in the geopolitics of the Middle East. In a stroke, Iran shed almost four decades of rogue-state status and was declared a citizen of good standing of the international community, open to trade, investment and diplomacy. This, without giving up, or even promising to change, its policy of subversion and aggression. This, without having forfeited its status as the world's greatest purveyor of terrorism.

Overnight, it went not just from pariah to player but from pariah to dominant regional power, flush with \$100 billion in unfrozen assets and virtually free of international sanctions. The oil trade alone will pump tens of billions of dollars into its economy. The day after Implementation Day, President Hassan



Charles Krauthammer

Rouhani predicted 5 percent growth — versus the contracting, indeed hemorrhaging, economy in prenegotiation 2012 and 2013.

On Saturday, the Iranian transport minister announced the purchase of 114 Airbus from Europe. This inaugurates a rush of deals binding European companies to Iran,

thoroughly undermining Obama's pipedream of "snapback sanctions" if Iran cheats.

Cash-rich, reconnected with global banking and commerce, and facing an Arab world collapsed into a miasma of raging civil wars, Iran has instantly become the dominant power of the Middle East. Not to worry, argued the administration. The nuclear opening will temper Iranian adventurism and empower Iranian moderates.

The opposite is happening. And it's not just the ostentatious, illegal ballistic missile launches; not just Iran's president reacting to the most puny retaliatory sanctions by ordering his military to accelerate the missile program; not just the videotaped and broadcast humiliation of seized U.S. sailors.

Look at what the mullahs are doing at home. Within hours of "implementation," the regime disqualified 2,967 of roughly 3,000 moderate candidates from even running in parliamentary elections next month. And just to make sure we got the point, the supreme leader reiterated that Iranian policy — aggressively interventionist and immutably anti-American — continues unchanged.

In 1938, the morning after Munich, Europe woke up to Germany as the continent's dominant power. Last Sunday, the Middle East woke up to Iran as the regional hegemon, with a hand — often predominant — in the future of Syria, Yemen, Iraq, the Gulf Arab states and, in time, in the very survival of Israel.

And we're arguing over an asymmetric hostage swap.