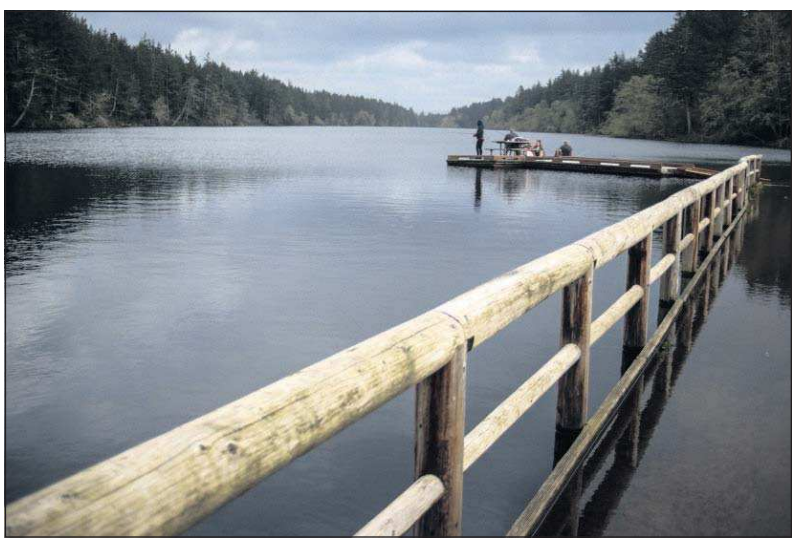


# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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Photos by Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

People fish at Coffenbury Lake at Fort Stevens State Park. The park is forming a partnership with Clatsop Paddle Company to offer adventure packages that bundle a stay at the park with paddle boarding on the lake.

## As more visit parks, more funding needed

*Time is short to get needed repairs done*

Spend much time in the Lower Columbia region's extensive inventory of state parks and it becomes obvious they are now year-round attractions.

Our Friday story took a thorough look at Fort Stevens State Park and how visitor numbers have steadily climbed, really only quieting down in the deep winter months of December and January.

This stands to reason. The summer of 2015 was an exceptionally busy tourism year around the Columbia estuary and seashore towns, reflecting a recovered economy, fine weather and an expanding urban population in search of coastal adventure. It's natural that this growing interest in the coast is bulging into other seasons.

Across the river in Pacific County, there were nearly 3.9 million visits to state parks in 2015, nearly 11 percent of the total for the entire Washington State Parks system. Far more so than in even the recent past, traffic in Cape Disappointment State Park, one of the state's star attractions, remained lively throughout much of this winter.

With an additional 200,000 residents expected to settle in Portland in the next two decades and Washington state anticipating another 2.25 million people in about the same period, coastal state parks face an age of unprecedented popularity and pressure.

In Fort Stevens, personnel obviously relish having

visitors throughout the year to enjoy the park's amazing assets, including comfortable new cabins that make winter more enticing. These visitors create more revenue and justification for state appropriations, but at the same time require staffing at a time of the year when some state parks used to be closed. Time is in short supply to do maintenance projects, formulate plans, or even merely recharge morale and energy.

It's vital that legislators provide enough funding so parks can keep up with growing visitor numbers. This must include making sure there is adequate year-round staffing. There needs to be money for maintenance and construction of facilities for future demand, and funds so gateway communities have highways, intersections, policing and emergency services to keep up with crowds. (Currently, for example, neither state does particularly well at patrolling state beaches.)

We're exceptionally fortunate to have the state parks we do — plus Lewis and Clark National Historical Park. But creating parks is never enough. We have to keep up with funding and maintaining these assets that serve the recreational needs of local citizens while pumping millions into our economy.



Since the park added 11 deluxe cabins five years ago, the park has seen more visitors in the winter.

# Lose with Cruz: A love story

By FRANK BRUNI  
*New York Times News Service*

It was clear to me weeks ago, even before Marco Rubio threw in the towel, that the GOP was getting ready to cuddle with Ted Cruz.

But I never expected a love quite like this to bloom.

It's a singularly tortured love, one that grits its teeth, girds its loins and pines for a contested convention.

It's hate worn down into resignation, disgust repurposed as calculation. Stopping a ludicrous billionaire means submitting to a loathsome senator. And so they submit, one chastened and aghast Republican leader after another, murmuring sweet nothings about Cruz that are really sour somethings about Donald Trump.

Will they still respect themselves in the morning?

I'm not sure we've ever witnessed a capitulation this grudging, a cynicism this grotesque, a reversal of regard this fraudulent and flat-out hilarious. While politics is an impure arena in which yesterday's enemies routinely become tomorrow's allies, the transmogrification of Cruz goes beyond that, proving that in the right circumstances, with the right motivation, you can see just about anyone in a newly flattering light.

Attila the Hun? True, he was truculent, but what a can-do spirit! Torquemada? A tad rigid, yes, but that's what righteousness sometimes looks like.

Cruz has gone from the insufferable nemesis of Republican traditionalists to their last, best hope, and the likes of Mitt Romney, Lindsey Graham and Jeb Bush have now given him endorsements — or approximations thereof — that will go down in political history as some of the most constipated hosannas ever rendered.

They hardly mention Cruz's name. They barely manage to assign him a single virtue.

"Consistent," Bush called him — in a Facebook post. He apparently couldn't rouse or debase himself to a proper news conference.

He was following the lead of his younger brother Neil, who had signed up with Cruz a few weeks earlier and explained, "I commit this from my head, not my heart." There's a sentence you won't find on a Valentine's Day card.

Graham professed his devotion during an interview on "The Daily Show."

"I'm on the Ted train, absolutely," he told Trevor Noah, but when Noah

pressed him about the charms of that particular mode of transportation, he confessed that he would have preferred another — possibly an Edsel, maybe even a tricycle with a wobbly front wheel. "He was my 15th choice. What can I say?"

Not much that's laudatory, apparently. Cruz is the love that chokes on its own words.

It's a surprise-every-second love. On Friday, Cruz made public reference to — and furiously denied — a National Enquirer story that accused him of affairs.

It's also a love that makes no promises of its endurance. In fact, many of the Republicans in a faux swoon for the far-right loon don't really want to see him fly all the way to the White House — or, for that matter, to the nomination.

There's a tangle of mindsets at work and strategies in play. They all involve thwarting Trump, but with different outcomes in the end. Bear with me. This requires a bit of explanation.

Few of the Cruz converts actually think he can amass a majority of delegates and win the nomination before the convention. For that to happen,

their endorsements of Cruz would have to scare off John Kasich and turn the contest into a two-man race, and Kasich doesn't seem to be scaring.

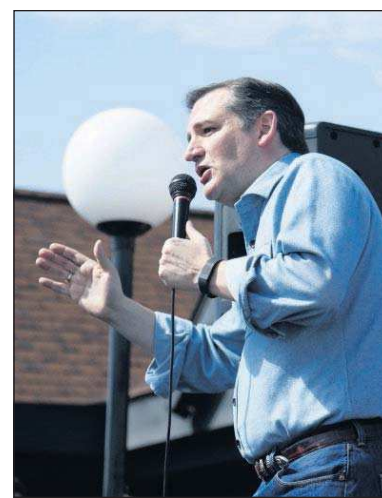
The real goal is to buck up Cruz to a point where he prevents Trump from getting that majority and either passes him in the delegate count or draws close. Abracadabra: a contested convention.

Some of the new Cruz devotees indeed hope that he would be the beneficiary of that and the ultimate victor. They expect Cruz to lose the presidency. But then they also expect Trump to lose it — and to lose it in an uglier, more divisive fashion that drags down Republicans running for the House and Senate, too. This lose-with-Cruz faction figures that a reset of the party after a Cruz defeat would be possible, whereas Trump might not leave them with much of a party to reset.

Others who have crawled into bed with Cruz are also after a contested convention, but would use it to crawl out of that bed and into the arms of some Republican Romeo waiting in the wings. Maybe Paul Ryan, though he's playing Hamlet: to be drafted or not to be drafted? Maybe Mitt Romney, who seems readier to commit.

Both Ryan and Romney have stepped forward with high-minded soliloquies about the GOP's values and future, and while that may well be a reflection of conscience, mightn't it also be a fig leaf over ambition?

And at least a few of those canoodling with Cruz see him as a bridge to



Jim Mone/AP Photo

Republican presidential candidate, Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas speaks to supporters at a campaign stop at the Altoona Family Restaurant, Monday, in Altoona, Wis.

Kasich. In this convoluted scenario, endorsing Kasich now serves no purpose: He has too few delegates to compete with, and foil, Trump. But if the convention turns into a free-for-all, then Republicans will be free to realize what polling has repeatedly told them, and what is almost indisputably true: Kasich would be their best bet against Hillary Clinton, if only they could see his sex appeal.

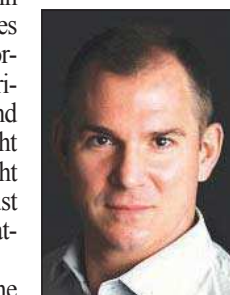
Poor Kasich. He governs the crucial battleground of Ohio, has high approval ratings there, has made a stand for decency in an indecent age, and is out there on the campaign trail wrapping his arms around every last American who will stand still long enough to let him. Even so he's spurned.

"Does Kasich have a following?" wrote conservative columnist John Podhoretz just days ago. "Yes, he does, of people who still cry when they listen to 'Eleanor Rigby' and its invocation of 'all the lonely people' and who want a hug because their Aunt Minnie has the shingles."

So the answer, at least for now, is Cruz? In this bitter season, yes. Sixty percent of Republicans are embarrassed by their party's presidential race, according to a recent survey by The Times and CBS News, and a Gallup poll released Friday revealed that only 30 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents think that the election process is working properly. Cruz is the pinup for pessimistic times.

Even John McCain, who once dismissed him and Rand Paul as "wacko birds," said last week that Cruz has what it takes to manage the mess of the Middle East. He hastened to add that he would feel obliged to work with, and support, any Republican who is elected president, and "to put aside my anger."

That's the way Republican leaders fall for Cruz — with apologies, asterisks, angst. The terms of endearment are teary ones, because this isn't the relationship they wanted. It's the only relationship that's left. He gets their love because someone must. Isn't it romantic?



Frank Bruni

**Will they still respect themselves in the morning?**

## Open forum

### 'Yes' on recall

Voters of Precincts 20 and 45: You have received a political circular signed by and paid for by the three members being recalled from the Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District Board asking for your no vote. This letter makes multiple misleading claims, giving this board way more credit for district accomplishments than it is due.

The circular states that only a small group of citizens, not affiliated with the district, would benefit from this recall. One-hundred-twenty-six valid signatures were gathered. More probably could have been gathered were they not public. Is the board contending this is a small number, and these are not members of the district? Are they not going to come if your house catches on fire, or you need emergency assistance?

The board contends only six current firefighter signed letters supporting former chief Mike Balzer. Obviously, the institution they are referring to in the letter is not an institution of higher mathematics. I have 17 signed letters. Some are from former firefighters — such as Lt. Mike Graham and retired firefighter/emergency medical technician Diane Schuette — but these by no means should be discounted.

The circular gives credit for an obligation bond being paid off a year early. This credit goes to Cannon Beach's rising property rates, and the county tax assessor. It establishes a timeline that predates most, or all, of the current members, yet fails to mention 30-year board member Al Aya. They also failed to give any credit to former chiefs Middaugh, Moon, Cleve Rooper, or Mike Balzer.

I am a 40-year resident of the resident of the area. I have served on several county or state boards, including one current special districts board. I initially defended the fire board, and

tentatively was skeptical of the recall. After attending their meetings and reviewing the facts, I have come to a different conclusion.

They are spending money on a temporary chief, unemployment they failed to pay into, and supplemental pay for Capt. Gardner. They recently received a disconnection notice from Pacific Power, which their accountant paid for. This was followed up by another notice, received from Northwest Natural Gas. They are paying Special Districts Association of Oregon for consulting fees. Do these payments meet your definition of fiscal and fiduciary responsibility?

The board did not inform Chief Balzer of his right to be at the meeting when they dismissed him. They purchased a lock from a business owned by Chief Balzer's daughter and son-in-law. Instead of having him escorted from the office by two board members, they had two police officers. At least they could give him a courtesy ride home.

I urge the voters of Precincts 20 and 45 to extend the same courtesy. Vote yes on the recall.

KEVIN D. WIDENER  
 Tolovana Park

### 'No' for recall

I urge voters to reject the recalls targeting three Cannon Beach Fire District Board members. As a member of the Fire District Budget Committee for the last several years, I have participated in numerous district committee and board meetings. With one exception, before Mike Balzer became chief, there were no members of the general public present. Had the public taken an active interest and attended even a smattering of meetings during Mike's tenure, they would understand and support Mike's dismissal.

For example, the budget is the

responsibility of the chief to prepare. Even if he doesn't prepare it, he clearly needs to fully understand and be able to explain it. Over the course of three budget cycles, I observed no significant improvement in Mike's ability to understand, or explain it. Rather, he became increasingly unpleasant over time when asked questions; often board members had to step in and explain for him.

Voters need to understand that Mike was clearly given more than fair notice of the board's general unhappiness with his performance. At the time of his performance evaluation several months before his dismissal, the board had ample documentation and reason to dismiss.

Out of a genuine desire for Mike's success, the decision was made to give him one more chance. Thus the evaluation included a work plan reflecting all of the prior board suggestions and requests for Mike to seek needed knowledge and improvement. Mike's response was to say that the plan was undoable.

Many people have said that what really bothers them is not the fact of Mike's dismissal, but how it was done. I agree that in some details it might have been handled more graciously, but that does not justify a recall. The fact remains that the fire district and the public deserve a better fire chief than Mike Balzer was willing to become.

When you live in a small town, it takes courage to fire a longtime resident with many friends. We are lucky to have a board with such dedicated and principled people, who are willing to put their personal concerns aside to do something that was bound to be controversial.

Vote against the recalls and for a stronger Volunteer Fire and Rescue District.

MARTY SCHWAB HARRIS  
 Tolovana Park