

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## El Niño predictions were off course

As the near-record 2015–16 El Niño continues to diminish — it's now weak to moderate — it is worth seeing if prewinter predictions and hype lived up to reality.

At least one observant reader recently pointed out that meteorologists and journalists spun El Niño predictions in a variety of sometimes-contradictory ways.

Though last fall's long-range forecast of a warmer-than-usual winter was quite accurate, precipitation in the Pacific Northwest was variously predicted to be "below average," "higher than normal," "dry" and "less." As we now know, our local winter rainfall was impressively heavy virtually from start to finish.

Insurance brokers, who bear real-world financial consequences of weather events, are perhaps the best judges of forecasting accuracy.

An analyst for the BMS Group of brokers on April 6 observed, "Climate forcers like El Niño and La Niña can help predict the frequency of overall weather activity, but truthfully, (making precise) long-term predictions about ... the power of severe weather is impossible." El Niño is only one of several atmospheric cycles, all of which interact to create local seasonal weather, the analyst noted.

Looking at the North Pacific as an enormous whole, the

## GOP played the wrong game, yielding Trump

Many coaches — football, basketball and otherwise — tell their players not to play the other team's game. That advice is just as useful in business and politics. If you know who you are or your long-term strategy, it's a mistake to abandon it for the game your competitor wants to play. Congressional Republicans made that mistake when they made a pariah out of the first black president. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell famously said his intention was to make Barack Obama a one-term president. At that point, congressional Republicans adopted a reflexive response and became the party of "No." They abandoned all pretense of positive values.

Steven Rattner has dissected the GOP's colossal error in a *New York Times* op-ed titled "By Opposing Obama, the Republicans Created Trump." Rattner documents how the GOP's obsessive negativity got in the way of helping the economically ravaged constitu-

NOAA-West Watch blog ([www.tinyurl.com/noaa-west-watch](http://www.tinyurl.com/noaa-west-watch)) observes El Niño did inject a lot of additional energy into the ocean system and the weather it delivered to our shores.

- Record waves battered West Coast shorelines, resulting in "approximately 45 percent more wave energy than normal hitting West Coast beaches, with about 40 percent more erosion than the average for the similar winter time frame."

- Rough conditions slowed Columbia ship traffic in December: "Pilots suspended shipping traffic across the Columbia River Bar nearly 10 times in the month of December, among the most closures in a single month that most pilots could remember." Conditions were much more moderate after Jan. 1, however.

- An El Niño-related warm-water algal bloom off Chile has killed more than 27 million farmed salmon, leading to a predicted "global supply shock" in coming months.

Looking at all this, El Niño clearly warranted the headlines last fall — but not for all the reasons journalists reported.

cies to whom Donald Trump is throwing the red meat of protectionism, racial-religious exclusion and racism.

Disingenuously, party leaders wonder what's become of the party of Lincoln. Rattner says that McConnell and others did the groundwork for Trump's game plan by doing nothing for eight years.

Sen. Lyndon Johnson — a much more adept legislative leader than McConnell — faced a choice in 1954, when he became Senate majority leader. Should he undercut President Eisenhower's program or accommodate it. The ultimate pragmatist, Johnson worked with Eisenhower and his Senate allies.

In their anger, Republican governors have even declined Obama's Medicaid expansion, which would give material assistance to the demographic that has become Trump's aggrieved constituency.

America is poorer for the GOP's so-called Obama Derangement Syndrome.

# Why Merkley supports Sanders

By U.S. Sen. JEFF MERKLEY  
 For The New York Times

No decision we make as Americans more dramatically affects the direction of our country than our choice for president.

He or she is more than the manager of the executive branch, commander in chief or appointer of judges.

The president reflects, but also helps define, our national values, priorities and direction.

After considering the biggest challenges facing our nation and the future I want for my children and our country, I have decided to become the first member of the Senate to support my colleague Bernie Sanders for president.

I grew up in working-class Oregon. On a single income, my parents could buy a home, take a vacation and help pay for college. My father worked with his hands as a millwright and built a middle-class life for us.

My parents believed in education and they believed in the United States. When I was young, my father took me to the grade school and told me that if I went through those doors, and worked hard, I could do just about anything because we lived in America. My dad was right.

Years later, my family and I still live in the same working-class community I grew up in. But America has gone off track, and the outlook for the kids growing up there is a lot gloomier today than 40 years ago.

Many middle-class Americans are working longer for less income than decades ago, even while big-ticket expenses like housing, health care and college have relentlessly pushed higher.

It is not that America is less wealthy than 40 years ago — quite

the contrary. The problem is that our economy, both by accident and design, has become rigged to make a fortunate few very well off while leaving most Americans struggling to keep up.

And as economic power has become more concentrated, so too has political power. Special interests, aided by their political and judicial allies, have exercised an ever-tighter grip on our political system, from the rise of unlimited, secret campaign spending to a voter-suppression movement.

Under President Obama's leadership, our country is fairer and more prosperous for all than it was seven years ago. But as we look toward the next administration, there is far more work to do. We need urgency. We need big ideas. We need to rethink the status quo.

Unlike the Republican primary circus, Democrats have a choice between two candidates with lifelong track records of fighting for economic opportunity and who are committed to America's being a force for peace and stability and who are eager to meet today's challenges and move our country forward for all its citizens, together.

From her time advocating for children as a young lawyer to her work as first lady of Arkansas and the United States, and as a senator and secretary of state, Hillary Clinton has a remarkable record. She would be a strong and capable president.

But Bernie Sanders is boldly and fiercely addressing the biggest challenges facing our country.

He has opposed trade deals with nations that pay their workers as little as a dollar an hour. Such deals have caused good jobs to move overseas and undermined the lever-



Jeff Merkley

age of American workers to bargain for a fair share of the wealth they create in our remaining factories.

He has passionately advocated for pivoting from fossil fuels to renewable energy to save our planet from global warming — the greatest threat facing humanity. He recognizes that to accomplish this we must keep the vast bulk of the world's fossil fuels in the ground.

Bernie is a determined leader in taking on the concentration of campaign cash from the mega-wealthy that is corrupting the vision of opportunity embedded in our Constitution.

And he has been unflinching in taking on predatory lending, as well as the threats to our economy from high-risk strategies at our biggest banks.

It has been noted that Bernie has an uphill battle ahead of him to win the Democratic nomination. But his leadership on these issues and his willingness to fearlessly stand up to the powers that be have galvanized a grass-roots movement. People know that we don't just need better policies, we need a wholesale rethinking of how our economy and our politics work, and for whom they work.

The first three words of the Constitution, in bold script, are "We the People." The American story is a journey of continuous striving to more fully realize our founding principles of hope and opportunity for all.

It is time to recommit ourselves to that vision of a country that measures our nation's success not at the boardroom table, but at kitchen tables across America. Bernie Sanders stands for that America, and so I stand with Bernie Sanders for president.

Jeff Merkley is a Democratic senator from Oregon.

## America has gone off track.

## Happy birthday, Beverly Cleary!

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF  
 New York Times News Service

*Ramona drummed harder to show everyone how bad she was. She would not take off her shoes. She was a terrible, wicked girl! Being such a bad, terrible, horrid, wicked girl made her feel good! She brought both heels against the wall at the same time. Thump! Thump! Thump! She was not the least bit sorry for what she was doing. She would never be sorry. Never! Never! Never!*

One of the world's great inventions, only a little behind the light bulb, was Ramona Quimby, the strong-willed, lovable and exasperating star of "Ramona the Pest" and other books.

For decades the Ramona books have been a gateway drug luring young readers into the spellbinding world of books.

Ramona's inventor, Beverly Cleary, has sold 85 million copies of her books about Ramona, Henry Huggins, Ralph S. Mouse and other beloved figures. Cleary turned 100 on Tuesday, so I asked her about her characters, her life and her wisdom.

Now living in a retirement home in Carmel, California, she immediately disclaimed any grand thoughts about reaching a century.

"I didn't plan on it," she explained dryly.

Cleary's only long-range plan is that when the time comes, she'll return to her Oregon hometown, Yamhill, to be buried beside her late husband in the local cemetery. As it happens, I'm also from Yamhill, population about 1,000, and Cleary is our hometown hero.

*"Miss Binney, I want to know — how did Mike Mulligan go to the bathroom when he was digging the basement of the town hall?"*

*Miss Binney's smile seemed to last longer than smiles usually last. Ramona glanced uneasily around and saw that others were waiting with interest for the answer.*

As a girl, Cleary was a late



Vern Fisher/Monterey Herald/AP

Beverly Cleary signs books at the Monterey Bay Book Festival in Monterey, Calif., in 1998. The feisty and witty author remembers the Oregon childhood that inspired the likes of characters Ramona and Beezus Quimby and Henry Huggins in the children's books that sold millions

reader because she didn't find most children's books very interesting. In her first-grade class, she was assigned to the lowest reading group, the Backbirds, and her teacher, Miss Falb, beat her on the palms for daydreaming.

So Cleary tried to drop out of school in the first grade. But her parents forced her to keep going, and Cleary eventually excelled in school and in college and found a job as a librarian in Yakima, Washington. A boy there complained that there weren't any books about kids like him.

In response, Cleary sat down and wrote about Henry Huggins and his dog, Spareribs. She thought her characters needed siblings, so she decided to torment Henry's friend Beezus with a pesky little sister — "and at that moment someone called out 'Ramona,' so I named her Ramona."

An editor suggested a few changes — such as turning "Spareribs" into "Ribsy" — and the book was published to immediate acclaim. Later volumes followed, including a series focused on Ramona, one of the great figures in children's literature.

Cleary says Ramona is her favorite character but isn't directly modeled on her. "I was a well-behaved girl," she said, "but I often thought like Ramona."

Cleary's works depict ordinary events drawn from her own childhood. Her cousin once caught a salmon with his bare hands, so she had Henry Huggins spotting and tackling a 29-pound salmon in an ocean stream. That left a deep impression on me as a boy, and ever since I've looked carefully in ocean streams for monster salmon.

In telling these stories, Cleary always refrains from inflicting larger lessons.

"As a child, I very much objected to books that tried to teach me something," she told me. "I just wanted to read for pleasure, and I did. But if a book tried to teach me, I returned it to the library."

*Miss Binney taught the class the words of a puzzling song about "the dawnzer lee light," which Ramona did not understand because she did not know what a dawnzer was. "Oh, say, can you see by the dawnzer lee light," sang Miss Binney.*

Cleary says that when she goes back to Yamhill, everything seems the same as ever — except that now the kids aren't playing in the streets but are inside watching television.

There's something to that. On any given day, U.S. children ages 8 to 12 consume almost six hours of entertainment, such as television, video games and social media, according to polling by Common Sense Media. Aside from schoolwork, 57 percent of those kids typically don't read at all.

We measure child poverty by household income, but a better metric might be how often a child hears stories read aloud. To honor Cleary's birthday, school organizations called on kids and parents to "drop everything and read."

So it's time to take a break from sordid politics to celebrate authors like Cleary who inspire us to read. Let's make what Ramona would call "a great big noisy fuss" about her creator's 100th birthday — for as they invent new worlds, great writers enrich our own.