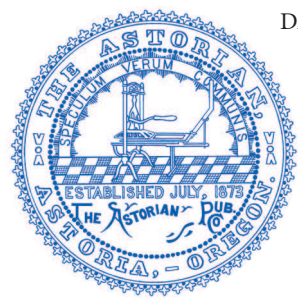


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OUR VIEW

It's past time to fix crumbling infrastructure

Warrenton's efforts to upgrade aged water and sewer lines are part of a nationwide problem that demands creative solutions. There are growing warnings around the country that consumers face steeply higher utility bills.

As we reported, in Warrenton as in many other towns in our region, obsolete and compromised pipes allow much drinking water to leak before it reaches paying customers, while storm and ground water infiltrates sewer lines, ballooning the cost of sewage purification. During wet weather, up to half the water that enters the wastewater treatment plant doesn't need to be there.

The intensity of winter rainfall here in our area is out of the ordinary, but the overall problem of failing water and sewer infrastructure is all too common. All around the U.S., pipes and treatment plants installed in the mid-20th century have reached the end of their functional lives. In some places, including Warrenton, previous choices to use pipes containing asbestos are no longer considered acceptable.

A comprehensive 2014 report by the Johnson Foundation (tinyurl.com/Johnson-Water-Report) and a story about it by the Circle of Blue website (tinyurl.com/jost6lc) show the scale of these issues and provide some useful guidance for policymakers.

"Water-cleaning and water-moving systems that were designed and installed to contend with different conditions generations ago are nearing the end of their design lives. American infrastructure needs to be updated, expanded, redesigned, and, in many cases, reinvented for 21st-century challenges," Circle of Blue observes.

This won't be cheap. Up until 1990, the federal government provided up to 90 percent of funding for sewage plants in the form of grants, in effect spreading the cost of sanitation among U.S. taxpayers. Nowadays, the vast majority of the bill for water infrastructure is footed at the state and local level. Reluctance to take on these expensive and ungratifying projects now adds up to a nationwide backlog estimated at \$400 to \$600 billion. Catching up with this work will mean higher water and sewer bills for everyone — a situation already all too familiar to many local residents. In Warrenton this fiscal year, water rates are going up 7 percent and sewer rates 6 percent to compensate for years of postponing rate hikes.

The Johnson Foundation report makes clear that much thought is going into these issues; there's good advice out there, if local officials choose to seek it. In Warrenton's case, its success at economic development provides the city with some good private partners that can be called upon to assist in designing a modern and equitable water/sewer system and rate structure.

It's time for all U.S. communities to deal with this long-deferred work. We need to use new technologies and strategies so we don't fall behind again.

Agricultural decisions should be based on facts

In a sincere and well-justified concern about collapse of honeybee colonies, it appears there may have been an unwarranted rush to judgment about a widely used agricultural chemical.

A team of researchers from Washington State University reported this month that neonicotinoid pesticides — sometimes called neonics and chemically similar to nicotine — pose little risk to bees in real-world settings. Imidacloprid, one type of neonic, is the most popular insecticide in the world. It clearly can kill bees. But WSU scientists found bees aren't exposed to enough of the pesticide to cause any harmful effects in rural and urban landscapes. Even in active farm settings, bees face very low risks so long as users follow label instructions. For example, insecticides should not be used during plant flowering stages when bees are likely to be foraging.

In our area, political posturing over neonics has stymied efforts by oyster growers to use them to control burrowing shrimp. Though it's obviously desirable to minimize pesticide use, imidacloprid is a huge improvement over the previous shrimp-control method.

Decisions about agricultural and aquaculture must be based on facts, not folklore. While we strive to minimize negative impacts on the environment, we must bear in mind that terrestrial and aquatic farmers are the best stewards among us.



Our new dumbed down democracy

By TIMOTHY EGAN
New York Times News Service

Are you smarter than an immigrant? Can you name, say, all three branches of government or a single Supreme Court justice? Most Americans, those born here, those about to make the most momentous decision in civic life this November, cannot. And most cannot pass the simple test aced by 90 percent of new citizens.

Well, then: Who controlled the Senate during the 2014 election, when control of the upper chamber was at stake? If you answered *Dumno* at the time, you were with a majority of Americans in the clueless category.

But surely now, when election news saturation is thicker than the humidity around Lady Liberty's lip, we've become a bit more clueful. I give you Texas. A recent survey of Donald Trump supporters there found that 40 percent of them believe that ACORN will steal the upcoming election.

ACORN? News flash: That community-organizing group has been out of existence for six years. ACORN is gone, disbanded, dead. It can no more steal an election than Donald Trump can pole vault over his Mexican wall.

Politically illiterate

We know that at least 30 million U.S. adults cannot read. But the current presidential election may yet prove that an even bigger part of the citizenry is politically illiterate — and functional. Which is to say, they will vote despite being unable to accept basic facts needed to process this American life.

"There's got to be a reckoning on all this," said Charlie Sykes, the influential conservative radio host, in a soul-searching interview with

Business Insider. "We've created this monster."

Trump, who says he doesn't read much at all, is both a product of the epidemic of ignorance and a main producer of it. He can litter the campaign trail with hundreds of easily debunked falsehoods because conservative media has spent more than two decades tearing down the idea of objective fact.

If Trump supporters knew that illegal immigration peaked in 2007, or that violent crime has been on a steady downward spiral nationwide for more than 20 years, they would scoff when Trump says Mexican rapists are surging across the border and crime is out of control.

If more than 16 percent of Americans could locate Ukraine on a map, it would have been a Really Big Deal when Trump said that Russia was not going to invade it — two years after they had, in fact, invaded it.

If basic civics was still taught, and required, for high school graduation, Trump could not claim that judges "sign bills."

Potty talk

The dumbing down of this democracy has been gradual, and then — this year — all at once. The Princeton Review found that the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 were engaged at roughly a high school senior level. A century later, the presidential debate of 1960 was at a 10th grade level. By the year 2000, the two contenders were speaking like sixth-graders. And in the upcoming debates — "Crooked Hillary" against "Don the Con" — we'll be lucky to get beyond preschool potty talk.

How did this happen, when the populace was so less educated in the days when most families didn't even have an indoor potty to talk about? You can look at one calculated loop of misinformation over the last two weeks to find some of the answer.

A big political lie often starts on

the Drudge Report, home of Obama-Muslim stories. He jump-started a recent smear with pictures of Hillary Clinton losing her balance — proof that something was very wrong with her. Fox News then went big with it, using the Trump adviser and free-media enabler Sean Hannity as the village gossip. Then Rudy Giuliani, the internet diagnostician, urged people to Google "Hillary Clinton illness" for evidence of her malady. This forced Clinton to prove her stamina, in an appearance on "Jimmy Kimmel," by opening a jar of pickles.

The only good thing to come out of this is that now, when you Google "Hillary Clinton illness" what pops up are scathing stories about a skeletal-faced rumormonger named Rudy Giuliani, and a terrific Stephen Colbert takedown of this awful man.

Liars

But what you don't know really can hurt you. Last year was the hottest on record. And the July just passed was earth's warmest month in the modern era. Still, Gallup found that 45 percent of Republicans don't believe the temperature. We're not talking about doubt over whether the latest spike was human-caused — they don't accept the numbers, from all those lying meteorologists.

Of late, almost half of Floridians have done something to protect themselves from the Zika virus, heeding government warnings. But the other half cannot wish it away, as the anti-vaccine crowd on the far left does for serious and preventable illnesses.

I'm sorry that my once-surging Seattle Mariners dropped two out of three games to the New York Yankees this week. I just prefer not to believe it. And look — now my guys are in first place, no matter what the skewed "standings" show. In my own universe, surrounded by junk fact and junk conclusions, I feel better already.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thanks, Mr. Smith

Sometimes you come across someone who really makes a difference, and it requires sharing. We recently saw a sale in a local market — Main Street Market in Warrenton, to be exact — of a product that one of the food banks very much needed. I contacted the owner, Tommy Smith, to see if we could make a large purchase of the item, even though the sale had ended.

Mr. Smith was willing to extend the sale price, and work with me on packaging and pick up. He kept telling me how much he appreciated what I was doing, but the reality is that he was the one who deserves the appreciation.

Mr. Smith: Thank you!

Shopping locally does make a difference.

DAN DECKER
 Warrenton

Affordable housing?

I read that the City of Warrenton is going to tackle "affordable housing" ("Warrenton aims to tackle affordable housing scarcity," *The Daily Astorian*, Aug. 24). The shortage we have is not necessarily affordable housing; rather the shortage everywhere is low-income housing.

What many people do not realize

is that there is a sector of our population who are very low income, some as low as \$731 a month on Supplemental Security Income. Shocked, are you? Well, you should be even more shocked at some of the low end — dare I say, at times even deplorable — dwellings that get a new paint job and carpet then the rent jacked up. Some I know of, secondhand, to \$900 a month, or more. Some of those are even requiring tenants to have rental insurance. Try doing first, last and a deposit on that income.

In our capitalist society, and I'm not decrying that, most things are profit-driven. Some should not be, and some should be. Health care coverage and health care should not be profit-driven. Housing is an area that should be profit-driven, but to offset that, and address the low income sector of our population, there must be a means to ensure that low-income apartments and such are increased and maintained.

Some try and get the "Yes, we need low-income housing, just not in our backyard" brick wall. People have to acquiesce sometimes. Apartment complexes or rehabbed homes need to be located where they can, if this serious, life-impacting problem is ever to be adequately addressed.

Investors buy old apartments,

rehab them, and then double the rent, causing the low-income renters to have to move, thereby increasing our homeless population. Have you even given thought to the emotional impact to those affected by these incidents? How would you feel?

I mean let's get real. Affordable housing means homes built as close to the bare building code standards as possible, then sold for as much money as can be gotten for them. These homes are intended for the young couple who have finally been able to scratch their way out of minimum-wage jobs.

Affordable housing isn't meant for those with a low income. Try buying an affordable house on \$731, which is impossible, and honestly not the normal goal of folks on low income. Heck, you cannot rent anything for \$731 a month without rental assistance, which is two-plus years on a waiting list.

So the issue, to me, is to realize the difference between affordable housing and low income housing. If our elected officials want to tackle housing problems, and they should, tackle low income housing because everyone deserves a clean, warm, accessible and dry place to live.

STEVE HAWKS
 Warrenton