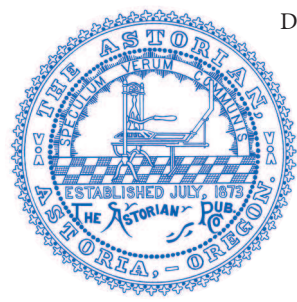


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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OUR VIEW



Commercial fishing vessels crowd the mooring basin at Port of Ilwaco, Washington, in 2015. *File Photo*

Fishing essential in monetary and cultural ways

For fishing communities, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's annual publication about commercial landings makes great reading. As we've observed in the past, "Fisheries of the United States" is interesting here in much the same way crop reports are a topic of fascination for farmers.

Make no bones about it: Irrespective of decades of impressive economic diversification, the Lower Columbia and nearby places like Garibaldi, Newport, Willapa Bay and Westport, Washington, are fishing communities in essential cultural and monetary ways. Fishing dollars bounce around coastal towns and bolster the business climate in much the way fish fertilizer makes plants prosper.

Analysis of multiyear trends points out some disturbing news about the strength of commercial fisheries on the Lower Columbia. The 2015 edition of the annual fisheries compendium from the National Marine Fisheries Service (tinyurl.com/2015FishReport) finds Astoria-area landings at something of a low ebb.

With about 92 million pounds of landings, we were in 13th place nationwide in terms of volume in 2015. Reflecting the relatively low price of some local harvests — such as hake and sardines — we were in 27th place nationwide in the value of landings — about \$38 million. In our vicinity, we were far behind Westport, Washington, in terms of value of the 2015 catch — Westport was 12th in the U.S. with a 2015 total of \$65 million.

More important than annual "horse race" statistics between ports is how well fishing fleets succeed over time. In Astoria's case, current trends are worrisome. Despite the superficial pleasure of remaining the mainland West Coast's No. 1 fishing port by volume, other 2015 indicators exhibit a troubling descent from recent heights.

As recently as 2012, our percentage of the nationwide catch was 1.764 percent. From there, it slid to 1.6 percent in 2013, 1.3 in 2014 and 0.947 last year. Total poundage landed last year was the lowest since at least 2010. Landings were down 46 percent in 2015 since a recent peak in 2012. Last year's catch also had the lowest value since 2010 and is 24 percent less than in 2013.

None of this means anyone locally is at fault, apart from the all-too-typical situation in fishing in which booms are invariably followed by busts. An example of this is the sardine catch. Pacific sardines collapsed in 2015. The catch was 8.4 million pounds, down from 51.1 million in 2014 and a recent annual average of 131.65 million pounds. In may behoove us to harvest at a more moderate rate whenever they next rebound — though we are aware of the countervailing argument that sardines might just naturally be prone to big swings and fishermen should therefore go after them with gusto whenever they get a chance. It also is possible that our area's fishing results were impacted by the mid-2013 Pacific Seafoods fire in Warrenton — overall local landings fell from 159 million in 2013 to 122 million in 2014. But this explanation isn't likely to account for very much of the difference. Although Pacific Seafoods is an undeniably huge player in the industry, its personnel took quick and professional steps to move to temporary facilities immediately after the fire.

The largest worry in terms of fishing trends are the ways in which the northeast Pacific Ocean's productivity was hammered from 2013 to 2015 by the ocean heatwave called the Blob, along with an associated surge in toxic algae. The Blob showed some initial signs of coming back to life this fall, but thankfully has now faded again. Scientists have little doubt it will return in coming years, adding to problems in a generally warmer and more acidic ocean by midcentury. These changes will become a permanent damper on a long-vital economic sector.

Our ailing ocean demands that we continue seeking economic diversification, while doing all we can to make sure fishing remains as viable as possible. For one thing, improving the rationality of regulations can enhance returns for fishing boats and improve the odds of meeting conservation goals. Faced with environmental threats to fishing like the Blob, we should do everything possible to eliminate man-made obstacles to the fishing economy, including the asinine ban on mainstem Columbia gillnet fishing.

Fishermen have more than enough problems without politicians adding to them.



Working the refs

By PAUL KRUGMAN
New York Times News Service

The cryptic letter James Comey, the FBI director, sent to Congress on Friday looked bizarre at the time — seeming to hint at a major new Clinton scandal, but offering no substance. Given what we know now, however, it was worse than bizarre, it



was outrageous. Comey apparently had no evidence suggesting any wrongdoing by Hillary Clinton; he violated long-standing rules about commenting on politically sensitive investigations close to an election; and he did so despite being warned by other officials that he was doing something terribly wrong.

So what happened? We may never know the full story, but the best guess is that Comey, like many others — media organizations, would-be nonpartisan advocacy groups, and more — let himself be bullied by the usual suspects. Working the refs — screaming about bias and unfair treatment, no matter how favorable the treatment actually is — has been a consistent, long-term political strategy on the right. And the reason it keeps happening is because it so often works.

You see this most obviously in news coverage. Reporters who find themselves shut up in pens at Donald Trump rallies while the crowd shouts abuse shouldn't be surprised: constant accusations of liberal media bias have been a staple of Republican rhetoric for decades. And why not? The pressure has been effective.

Part of this effectiveness comes through false equivalence: news organizations, afraid of being attacked for bias, give evenhanded treatment to lies and truth. Way

back in 2000 I suggested that if a Republican candidate said that the earth was flat, headlines would read, "Views differ on shape of planet." That still happens.

The desire to get right-wing critics off one's back may also explain why the news media keep falling for fake scandals. There's a straight line from the Whitewater investigation — which ran for seven years, was endlessly hyped in the press, but never found any wrongdoing on the part of the Clintons — to the catastrophically bad coverage of the Clinton Foundation a couple of months ago. Remember when The Associated Press suggested scandalous undue influence based on a meeting between Hillary Clinton and a donor who just happened to be both a Nobel Prize winner and an old personal friend?

Sure enough, much of the initial coverage of the Comey letter was based not on what the letter said, which was very little, but on a false, malicious characterization of the letter by Jason Chaffetz, the Republican chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. You might think reporters would have learned by now not to take what people like Chaffetz say at face value. Apparently not.

Nor is it just the news media. A few years ago, during the peak of deficit-scold influence, it was striking to see the various organizations demanding deficit reduction pretend that Democrats who were willing to compromise and Republicans who insisted on slashing taxes for the wealthy were equally at fault. They even gave a "fiscal responsibility" award to Paul Ryan, whose budget proposals gave smoke and mirrors a bad name.

And as someone who still keeps a foot in the academic world, I've

been watching pressure build on universities to hire more conservatives. Never mind the way climate denial, attacks on the theory of evolution, and all that may have pushed academics out of the GOP. The fact that relatively few conservatives teach, say, physics, is supposed to be grossly unfair. And you know some schools will start hiring less qualified people in response.

Which brings us back to Comey. It seemed obvious from the start that Clinton's decision to follow Colin Powell's advice and bypass State Department email was a mistake, but nothing remotely approaching a crime. But Comey was subjected to a constant barrage of demands that he prosecute her for ... something. He should simply have said no. Instead, even while announcing back in July that no charges would be filed, he editorialized about her conduct — a wholly inappropriate thing to do, but probably an attempt to appease the right.

It didn't work, of course. They just demanded more. And it looks as if he tried to buy them off by throwing them a bone just a few days before the election. Whether it will matter politically remains to be seen, but one thing is clear: he destroyed his own reputation.

The moral of the story is that appeasing the modern American right is a losing proposition. Nothing you do convinces them that you're being fair, because fairness has nothing to do with it. The right long ago ran out of good ideas that can be sold on their own merits, so the goal now is to remove merit from the picture.

Or to put it another way, they're trying to create bias, not end it, and weakness — the kind of weakness Comey has so spectacularly displayed — only encourages them to do more.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Not a sales tax

Defeat the Tax says Measure 97 is a new sales tax. Measure 97 reforms the existing corporate minimum income tax. It is not a sales tax. The corporate tax already is based on gross sales instead of net profits so corporations cannot avoid paying taxes.

Avoidance is a problem. Corporate taxes have gone from 18 percent of state revenue to 6.7 percent. Current corporate tax revenues are allocated as the legislature chooses. Measure 97 requires that new revenues be allocated to education, health care and senior services.

Defeat the Tax bases its arguments on the false assumption that the 1/4 of 1 percent affected will raise prices. Prices will not be raised because:

- An Oregon Consumer League study compared corporations' prices for the same items in different states, and found "no connection to the prices large corporations charge and the level of state taxes they pay."

- Oregon has the lowest corporate tax in the U.S. The few companies affected will not leave because there's no greener pasture. They cannot raise prices and still compete with the other 99.75 percent.

- Corporations deduct state income taxes on federal tax returns.

Defeat the Tax claims Measure 97 will "hurt seniors and low-income families the most." Measure 97 is endorsed by the Oregon

State Council for Retired Citizens, League of Women Voters, Oregon Assembly for Black Affairs, Oregon Latino Health Coalition and Children First for Oregon. Eight of the top 10 contributors to Defeat the Tax are out-of-state corporations, including Chevron, Shell, Phillips 66 and Wells Fargo. You decide.

GREG FISHWICK
 Grants Pass

Big companies a threat

I just received my property tax assessment for next year. It's about 2.9 percent higher than this year. The opponents of Measure 97 complain that passage of that referendum will be "the biggest tax increase in Oregon history." I know that there are convenient and semantic differences among tax rates, fees and percentages but still ... my 2.9 percent is larger than their 2.5 percent.

The big companies and corporations are threatening us (we, their consumers) with punitive price increases, higher rates and layoffs. Let's see. Who can I punish for my property tax increase? Where can I relieve the pressure on my income and profit? Nowhere.

Have the big businesses suggested that their shareholders take a bit less to compensate for the increase? Have they suggested that their CEOs (whom we know are already grossly overpaid) take one for the team? No. If Measure 97

passes, I have the choice of paying less for grocery prices (smarter shopping), higher utility rates (cutting my usage), insurance rates (find a more affordable rate) and other services that allow me the options that I cannot access with a personal tax increase.

Take matters into your own hands. Vote yes on Measure 97.

BOB POTTER
 Astoria

Upsetting ads

Watching TV and reading the newspaper have made me so upset. Trump wants to cancel Social Security and all other pensions when he takes office. I would like to ask if all of you overly rich people think he is the best thing since sliced bread because he is going to give you huge tax relief. That will come by cutting all the money that we have been paying the last years. It is very scary to us older people who depend on this source of income.

I have a couple more scary things about him being elected. He will have us at war within three to six months after taking office. He supports Putin from Russia in all his activities.

That is all for now. I know all the Trump supporters will call me a liar, but I am just going by what he — and those running for Republican offices — put in their TV ads.

JERRY WINTERS
 Warrenton