

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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OUR VIEW

Brown's budget fails the state's struggling youth

Closing the North Coast Youth Correctional Facility is a bad idea in every way, but one that may prove hard to avoid in light of a coming \$1.7 billion state budget shortfall for the next two-year funding cycle.

Although its residents aren't there by choice — having been sentenced for breaking the law — it probably isn't quite right to call it a youth prison. It is a form of energetic intervention by society to try to save youths whose lives are slipping off course. Young men between the ages of 14 and 25 get a chance to earn high school diplomas — 30 last year and 15 so far this year — while learning how to resist addiction behaviors and gang involvement.

The facility was whipsawed by a previous state budget crisis, closing in 2003 at a cost of much disruption to troubled young people and a loss of 100 local jobs with a payroll of \$3.5 million a year. The threatened closure this time is related to failure of controversial corporate tax hike Measure 97. Reopened on a smaller scale with a mission of serving young wrongdoers with substance-abuse problems, it currently houses 45 and produces a local payroll of about \$2.5 million. The equivalent of 45 good-paying professional positions will be lost.

State budget woes are largely blamed on reductions in federal funds for the Affordable Care Act and the unfunded liability of the Public Employees Retirement System. The Affordable Care Act is certain to remain in turmoil as congressional Republicans and the new GOP president begin following through on plans to scrap and replace it, while PERS is a state-made problem that defeats every effort at a long-term solution. But Oregon clearly must find ways to stand on its own and live up to its obligations to all citizens.

It is interesting, and deplorable, that Gov. Kate Brown's plans to address this immediate funding crisis chose to close just two outlying state facilities — the state psychiatric hospital in Junction City and the North Coast Youth Correctional Facility. It is difficult to imagine two more vulnerable populations than the mentally ill and disadvantaged youth with behavioral and substance issues.

At the same time, in her proposed budget, Brown failed to address the PERS crisis, an omission that is a bit like offering a battle strategy and leaving out ammunition costs.

Fortunately, there are legislators who — unlike the governor — see the need to address the problem and have the courage to do so. The proposals they are most actively discussing would invite three constituencies to participate in a solution: public sector employers, PERS members and Oregon taxpayers. It is a realistic coalition of shared sacrifice.

The greatest political advances in history have occurred when a leader goes against his or her native values to break new ground. President Richard Nixon, the arch anti-Communist, opened diplomacy with what was then called Red China. President Lyndon Johnson, a Southerner, passed landmark Civil Rights legislation.

For there to be a breakthrough and a remedy on PERS, it will require an act of courage from Oregon's Democratic leaders, because they are most beholden to the public employees unions.

Meanwhile, in the case of the Youth Authority and its budget, this on-again, off-again semi-commitment to the good works performed in Warrenton penalizes personnel and facility residents alike, with a demoralized staff left feeling like their work doesn't matter. It does; it matters very much.

Oregon's residents and leaders must find better ways to make sustainable commitments to our neighbors at greatest risk.

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 350 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone numbers. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

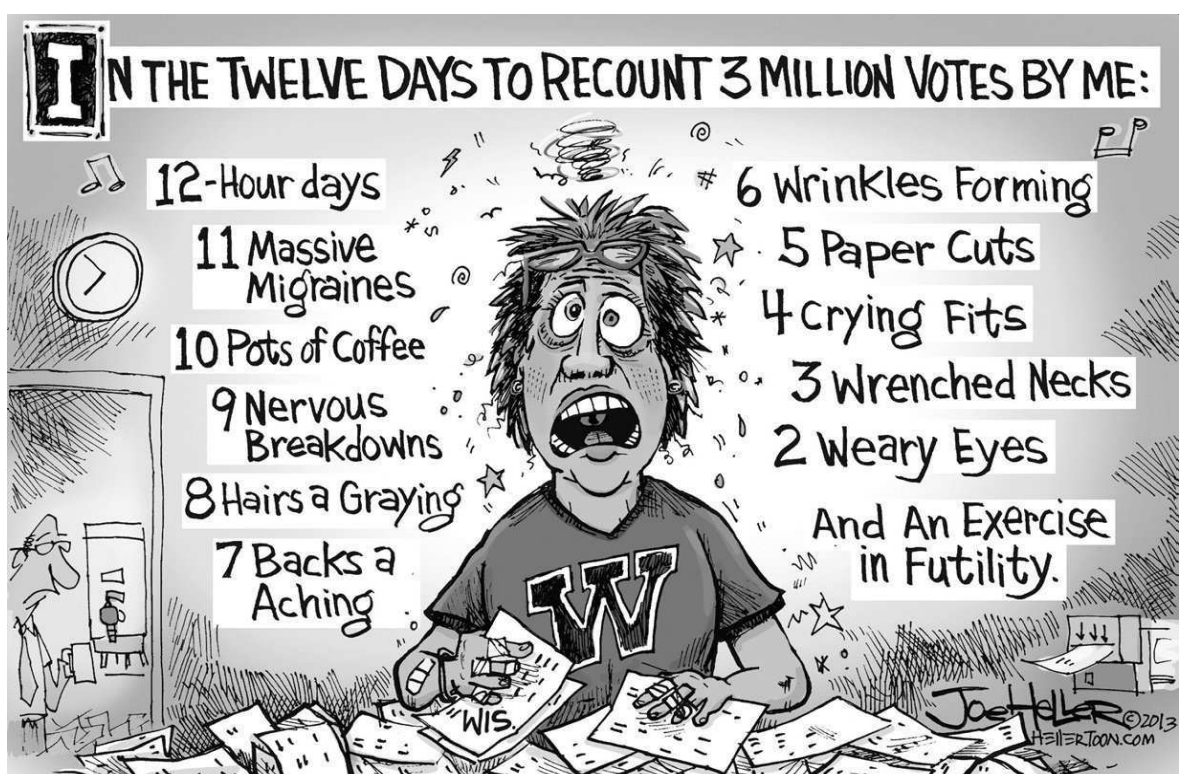
All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are printed each month.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than

mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner.

Submissions may be sent in any of these ways:

E-mail to editor@dailyastorian.com; online at www.dailyastorian.com; delivered to the Astorian offices at 949 Exchange St. and 1555 N. Roosevelt in Seaside or by mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103.



GUEST COLUMN

Chance to push for salmon recovery

By GLEN SPAIN
 and JOEL KAWAHARA
 For The Daily Astorian

After decades of watching failed attempts to fix a broken system, West Coast fishermen now have a golden opportunity to push for a serious Columbia River salmon recovery plan. Federal agencies and dam operators will hold a public meeting in Astoria on Thursday to seek public input on a new approach — and it's crucial that they hear from the fishing community!

Wild salmon runs from the Columbia Basin, once 10 to 16 million strong, now stand at less than 3 percent of those numbers (less than 400,000 wild fish). Nearly half of this historical production was in the Snake River, but most of what's left of this habitat is behind four federal dams on the lower Snake River.

Those dams — Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose and Lower Granite — were built on the Snake (the Columbia River's largest tributary) in the 1960s and 70s. When the project was up for approval in 1949, Washington's Department of Fisheries warned that it would harm fisheries, writing: "Salmon must be protected from the type of unilateral thinking that would harm one industry to benefit another."

This warning went unheeded. Although they created a subsidized barge route for agriculture, the dams exacted an enormous economic and social toll through lost fishing economies.

More than two decades

The history of litigation seeking to secure adequate protection for salmon stretches back 24 years. Most recently, in May 2016, a federal judge in Oregon invalidated the federal government's fifth try at a legal Columbia River salmon plan.

The latest version — just like the four that came before it — doesn't do enough to safeguard endangered wild salmon, the judge ruled, and the entire system "cries out for a major overhaul."

This sent federal agencies back to the drawing board, prompting the Astoria meeting and others like it. The removal of the four lower Snake River dams is now firmly on the table, but it won't happen unless agencies are compelled to finally confront that it's the only viable path forward for salmon. Many scientists, including the Western Division of the American Fisheries Society, have already found Snake River dam removal to be the single most effective step that could be taken to rescue the Columbia Basin's endangered and threatened salmon runs. But the federal agencies have, to date, done their very best to ignore the dam removal option.

The four lower Snake River dams generate relatively little power, amounting to only 4 percent of the Columbia's federal power system's base production, most of it during April-June runoff periods when it is least needed. The only major benefit any of these four dams ever provided is heavily subsidized river barge transportation — but these marginal benefits are now swamped by the ever-rising costs of maintaining this aging system and could be cost-effectively replaced by investments in the more flexible existing rail system.

The West Coast salmon fleet once freely ranged the coasts from March until at least the end of October. Unfortunately, those kinds of seasons are no more. Conservation measures necessary to protect weakened Snake River fall-Chinook and other stocks increasingly constrain salmon fishing from Alaska to Central California.

\$500 million

In 2000, the government estimated the personal income value of the original historic Columbia

runs at approximately \$500 million/year, enough to support 25,000 family-wage jobs in coastal communities like Astoria, stretching all the way up to southeast Alaska and south to central California.

But during the 1990s, the annual economic value of all Columbia-based ocean salmon fisheries dropped to under \$20 million, and has only slightly improved since. The difference between those two numbers is what the industrialization of the Columbia River has ultimately cost our industry and our fishing communities.

In spite of massive historic losses, the West Coast salmon industry continues to depend upon Columbia and Snake River salmon. Recently, between 30 percent to 50 percent of ocean harvests from Southeast Alaska to Oregon are from the Columbia River, and it also provides for treaty and nontreaty in-river fisheries. Columbia River salmon still mean fishing jobs that supply needed income and a sense of pride and place for communities throughout the region. But hydroelectric development has cost our communities dearly.

We need federal agencies to follow the law, apply the best science, take input from the people of the region, and come up with a well-thought-out plan that offers a real solution. To get it right, they must legitimately analyze every option on the table — including an honest look at lower Snake River dam removal.

Federal agencies will hold a public meeting 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday at The Loft at the Red Building, 20 Basin St. All are welcome to attend and provide input.

Joel Kawahara (joelkaw@earthlink.net) is a long-time salmon troller working offshore Washington and Alaska, and a board member of both the Washington-based Coastal Trollers Association and Alaska Trollers.

Glen Spain is the northwest regional director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (www.pcffa.org).

Donald Trump's art of the scam

By PAUL KRUGMAN
 New York Times News Service

Remember Donald Trump's tax returns? It was unheard-of for a presidential candidate to refuse to release returns, since doing so strongly suggests that he has something to hide. And at first the Trump campaign offered excuses, claiming that the returns would eventually be made available once an IRS audit was done, or something. But at this point it's apparent that Trump believed, correctly, that he could violate all the norms, stonewall on even the most basic disclosure, and pay no political price.

Indeed, it's clear that Hillary Clinton was in effect punished for her financial transparency, while Trump was rewarded for his practice of revealing nothing about how he makes money.

And as a result, we can expect radical lack of transparency to be standard operating procedure in the new administration. In fact, it has already started.

Take, for example, the budget process. Normally, an incoming administration issues a fiscal plan conveying its priorities soon after taking office. But as the budget expert Stan Collender notes, there are strong indications that the Trump administration will ignore this precedent (and, possibly, the law) and simply refuse to offer any explanation of how its proposals are supposed to add up. All we'll get, prob-

ably, are assurances that it's going to be great, believe me.

True, we don't yet know for sure that there will be no budget. But it's already clear that bait-and-switch — big but empty promises, completely lacking in detail — will be central to Republican strategy on one key issue: the future of health coverage for millions of Americans.

Obamacare

The background: Back in 2010 President Barack Obama and the short-lived Democratic majority in Congress passed the Affordable Care Act with zero GOP support. Ever since, Republicans have promised to repeal the law as soon as they had a chance, replacing it with something much better. Strange to say, however, they have never described what their replacement would look like.

Almost seven years after Obamacare was enacted, Republicans haven't offered even the broad outline of a health reform plan. Why not?

Actually, there's no mystery here. While many Americans say they disapprove of Obamacare, large majorities approve of the things the Affordable Care Act does, notably ensuring that people with pre-existing medical conditions can still buy insurance. And there's no way to achieve these things without either a major expansion of government health programs — hardly a Republican priority — or something very much like the law Democrats passed.

Worse yet, from the Republican point of view, Obamacare has worked. It's not perfect, by a long shot, but the number of uninsured Americans has plummeted to its lowest level in history. And Americans newly insured thanks to Obamacare are highly satisfied with their coverage.

So what can the GOP offer as an alternative? We know what Republicans want: a free-for-all in which insurance companies can discriminate as they like, with minimal regulation and drastic cuts in government aid. Going there would, however, cause millions of Americans — many of them people who voted for Trump, believing that their recent gains were safe — to lose coverage. The political blowback would be terrible. Yet failing to repeal Obamacare would also bring heavy political costs.

There will, of course, be no replacement. And there's likely to be chaos in health care markets well before Obamacare's official expiration date, as insurance companies exit markets they know will soon collapse. But the political thinking seems to be that they can find a way to blame Democrats for the debacle.

It's all very Trumpian, if you think about it. An honest memoir of the president-elect's business career would be titled "The art of the scam." After all, his hallmark has been turning a profit on failed business projects, because he finds a way to leave other people holding the bag.