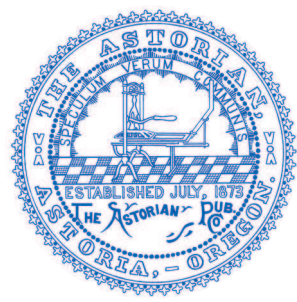


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OUR VIEW

Don't applaud just yet for proposed wave-energy facility

Much high-level political praise was heaped on a federal OK this month for a wave-energy test facility in Newport — some of it justified.

Making electricity from the ocean's always undulating waves has been a dream for decades. The European Marine Energy Centre lists 256 companies and other entities working on various wave power concepts.

Wave-energy converter machines run the gamut of human ingenuity. They depend on varying levels of complexity — it's possible to conceive of some being relatively straightforward to maintain, while others seem unlikely to survive for long.

The Newport facility authorized by Congress and the U.S. Department of Energy aims to "play an integral role in moving forward on the testing and refinement of wave energy technologies," its director said. Testing at the new center will provide proof of concept for inventions, a crucial last step before commercial installation.

Modern civilization lives on electricity. The old ways of making it — primarily by burning various forms of fossil fuels — are running their course. It's essential that we perfect technologies that don't produce greenhouse gases. (Never mind our recent cold snap relating to the end of a record El Niño: 2016 is almost certain to be the warmest year in human history, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.)

Considering the increasing need for clean power, why might anyone be less than enthusiastic about the Newport facility?

For one thing, it may not happen. Though it has been authorized, funds have not been appropriated. The new Trump administration is putting a Southern politician described as a "fierce deficit hawk" in charge of the budget.

Other concerns — if wave energy moves toward implementation here — include conflicts with fishermen and other existing users of near-shore waters. Transmitting electricity to the interstate grid also presents some monumental challenges.

All this means that while we can join in applauding movement toward wave energy, any real celebration remains drastically premature for now.

'The Boy Scout' earns his new leadership post

When Jeff Merkley was speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives, his close attention to members and his ability to count votes earned him the nickname "the Boy Scout." That capability has apparently been recognized in Merkley's seventh year as Oregon's junior U.S. senator.

Last week, the new Senate Minority Leader, Charles Schumer of New York, gave Merkley the position of chief deputy whip. The importance of this appointment is, as Merkley said last Friday, "it gets you into the leadership meetings."

Merkley has also gained a seat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. That plays to his undergraduate and graduate work at Stanford and Princeton universities — in international relations.

Each Congress has a different personality, and that is even more so for the Senate. The institution was designed to be a brake on a runaway House of Representatives or a reckless president. "Much of the political story of the Republic is the story of intermittent contest between the Senate and the Presidency," wrote William S. White in his classic 1956 work, *Citadel*.

As a new member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Merkley will have an opportunity to question Donald Trump's controversial nominee for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson. Of the president-elect, Merkley last Friday said, "I am most concerned about having someone with his emotional immaturity and high ego needs in control of the nuclear weapons."

More broadly Merkley said, "Right now, the (Trump) Cabinet nominations are counter to the messages of his campaign. He was going to take on Wall Street. But he's handed it over to Goldman Sachs."

Success in politics is largely about luck and getting a break. Merkley had the good fortune to challenge Sen. Gordon Smith when Smith was weakened by the growing disaffection for the Iraq War. And now Sen. Schumer has decided to give Merkley a large measure of responsibility. Another big break.

Jeff Merkley's unassuming exterior masks a relentless intellect and assiduous attention to detail. This new assignment is pregnant with opportunity for "the Boy Scout."



Building the Trump-era matrix

By ROSS DOUTHAT
New York Times News Service

Anyone who tells you, with perfect confidence, what a Trump administration will do is either bluffing or a fool. We have a prospective Cabinet and a White House staff, but we haven't got the first idea how the two will fit together or how the man at the top will preside over it all.

What we can do is set up a matrix to help assess the Trump era as it proceeds, in which each development gets plotted along two axes. The first axis, the X-axis, represents possibilities for Trumpist policy, the second, the Y-axis, scenarios for Donald Trump's approach to governance.

The policy axis runs from full populism at one end to predictable conservative orthodoxy on the other. A full populist presidency would give us tariffs and trade wars, an infrastructure bill that would have Robert Moses doing back flips, a huge wall and E-Verify and untouched entitlements and big tax cuts for the middle class. On foreign policy it would be Henry Kissinger meets Andrew Jackson: Détente with Russia, no nation-building anywhere, and a counterterrorism strategy that shoots, bombs and drones first and asks questions later.

In an orthodox-conservative Trump presidency, on the other hand, congressional Republicans would run domestic policy and Trump would simply sign their legislation: A repeal of Obamacare without an obvious replacement, big tax cuts for the rich, and the Medicare reform of Paul Ryan's fondest dreams. On foreign policy, it would offer hawkishness with a dose of idealistic rhetoric — meaning brinkmanship with Vladimir Putin plus military

escalation everywhere.

Authority vs. chaos

The second axis, the possibilities for how Trump governs, runs from ruthless authoritarianism at one end to utter chaos at the other. Under the authoritarian scenario, Trump would act on all his worst impulses with malign efficiency. The media would be intimidated, Congress would be gelded, the Trump family would enrich itself fantastically — and then, come a major terrorist attack, Trump would jail or intern anyone he deemed a domestic enemy.

At the other end of this axis, Trump and his team would be too hapless to effectively oppress anyone, and the Trump era would just be a rolling disaster — with the deep state in revolt, the media circling greedily and any serious damage done by accident rather than design.

Trump's transition can be charted along both axes. On policy, much of his Cabinet falls closer to the conventional conservative end, with appointees like Tom Price and Betsy DeVos, who would be at home in a Ted Cruz or Marco Rubio or even Jeb! administration.

On the other hand, his inner circle will have its share of truer Trumpists. Stephen Bannon is intent on remaking the GOP along nationalist lines, Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump seem eager for their paterfamilias to negotiate with Democrats, Peter Navarro is girding for a trade war with China. And Trump's foreign policy choices — especially Rex Tillerson at State — seem closer to full-Trumpist realpolitik than to Reaganism-as-usual.

On the governance axis, the president-elect's strong-arming of the private sector, his media-bashing tweets and his feud with the intelligence community all suggest an authoritarian timeline ahead.

But anyone who fears incompetence more than tyranny has plenty

of evidence as well. Trump's tweets might be a sign not of an incipient autocrat but of an unstable president who will undermine himself at every step. He has no cushion in popular opinion: If things go even somewhat badly, his political capital will go very fast indeed. He has plenty of hacks, wild cards and misfit toys occupying positions of real responsibility — and his White House has already had its first sex scandal!

Then, finally, there is the question of how the axes interact. A populist-authoritarian combination might seem natural, with Trump using high-profile deviations from conservative orthodoxy to boost his popularity even as he runs roughshod over republican norms.

But you could also imagine an authoritarian-orthodox conservative combination, in which congressional Republicans accept the most imperial of presidencies because it's granting them tax rates and entitlement reforms they have long desired.

Or you could imagine a totally incompetent populism, in which Trump flies around the country holding rallies while absolutely nothing in Washington gets done ... or a totally incompetent populism that ultimately empowers conventional conservatism, because Trump decides that governing isn't worth it and just lets Paul Ryan run the country.

Sweet spot

As for what we should actually hope for — well, the center of the matrix seems like the sweet spot for the country: A Trump presidency that is competent-enough without being dictatorial and that provides a populist corrective to conservatism without taking us all the way to mercantilism or a debt crisis.

But this is Donald Trump we're talking about, so a happy medium seems unlikely. Along one axis or the other, bet on the extremes.

A letter to Trump about health care

By DAVID LEONHARDT
New York Times News Service

Dear Mr. President-elect: Your position on universal health insurance has been admirably clear. You support it. You did before you ran for president and continued to do so in the campaign.

In 2000, you wrote, "We must have universal health care." In a Fox News debate last year, you said, "We have to take care of the people that can't take care of themselves." On "60 Minutes," you said, "Everybody's got to be covered."

I am writing to you now because I am concerned that Republicans in Congress do not share your goal and are not giving you good advice. I'm worried that they are not acting in the best interests of your presidency or the country. I encourage you to be skeptical of them.

It is entirely possible for you to sign a conservative health care bill that lives up to your belief in universal coverage. It's a bill that you could celebrate as a replacement of Obamacare. But it would be quite different from the bills that congressional Republicans are pushing.

When they claim that their bills will not take health insurance away from millions, they're engaging in magical thinking. They are trying to fool the media, voters and you.

They are focusing on a strategy of "repeal and delay," in which parts of Obamacare will remain for months or years. In the intervening

time, they say, they will somehow keep people from losing insurance.

But they do not have a realistic plan, despite years of talk. Nor, to be blunt, does your choice for secretary of health and human services, who is one of those congressional Republicans. And a repeal is likely to undermine insurance markets long before its effective date.

Businessman

Mr. President-elect, you are a businessman. You understand savvy executives don't simply live in the present. They look to the future. They're fond of quoting Wayne Gretzky: "Skate to where the puck is going, not where it has been."

Insurance executives can see through the magical thinking of politicians. They know that a functioning insurance market must include both healthy and sick people. There are very few ways to guarantee this combination. Without Obamacare's subsidies to help people buy coverage and its mandate (weak as it is) to require they have coverage, markets will break down. The healthy will leave, the sick will stay and costs will soar.

After a repeal is signed, the uncertainty will give insurers reason to exit quickly.

The chaos runs a risk of leaving millions of people without insurance early in your presidency. Many of them will be members of the white working class who voted for you. Everyone who loses insurance will be grist for criticism of you.

As you know, the Republican

leaders in Congress have never been your biggest fans. I think it's fair to say that they care more about being able to brag that they got rid of Obamacare than about your political standing. The bills they are considering threaten your standing.

Alternatives

But you have alternatives. The crucial first step is to avoid repealing the insurance expansion without simultaneously replacing it. The new Congress comes to Washington next week, and its members should know where you stand from the beginning. It won't work to promise millions of people health insurance on spec.

If you avoid this trap, you can push both parties toward a different version of universal coverage.

That deal could give states more flexibility to meet the top-line coverage goals. It could rely more heavily on subsidies to bring healthy people into the market — and ultimately scrap the mandate. It could permit insurers to charge young people less (and older people more). It could create incentives for personal responsibility, allowing higher prices for people who have voluntarily gone without insurance.

I will be honest that I do not favor some of these ideas and worry that they would cause hardships. But I was not elected president, and you were. And all of these ideas are within the realm of serious debate about our health care system.

For your sake and the country's, I hope you insist that Congress deals in reality. Magical thinking isn't good for a presidency.