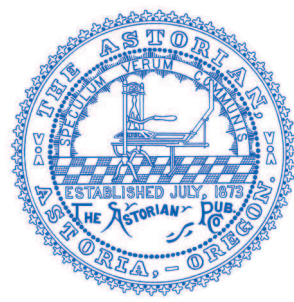


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OUR VIEW

There's still a good case for youth facilities

Proposed closures of the North Coast Youth Correctional Facility in Warrenton and the Naselle Youth Camp in Pacific County, Washington, are coincidental in a sense, but represent some similar flaws in thinking in the state capitals of Oregon and Washington.

It is safe to surmise there was no coordination between officials in Salem and Olympia to ax these facilities aimed at rehabilitation of young offenders, even though officials in the two states do attend many of the same regional meetings and share some of the same philosophies.

In both states, the good news is that there has been a decline in juvenile and young adult incarceration. An improving economy in recent years, changes in patterns of drug use and gang activity, and other factors all have combined to create good trends that diminish the need for incarcerating residents in the their teens and 20s.

Young correction still needed

There is, however, a continuing need for strong intervention in the lives of some young people. Breaking ingrained misbehavior and destructive ties with bad influences sometimes requires removing a young lawbreaker from the setting where they went astray. Some will continue being a danger to themselves and others so long as they remain immersed in the families and neighborhoods that landed them in trouble in the first place. Positive thinking and social work aren't always enough.

Intensive counseling in labor-intensive facilities like those in Clatsop and Pacific counties often proves effective in breaking these bad patterns. Both the North Coast Youth Correctional Facility and the Naselle Youth Camp have impressive records of succeeding in getting young people their high school diplomas and GEDs, a vital step toward mainstream employment and successful lives. Both facilities have been effective in helping many overcome drug and alcohol dependency. Though not all remain sober, these treatment options at least expose young offenders to the possibility that they may someday be able and willing to deal with addictive behaviors.

Effective therapies

Their remoteness from the population centers of the Interstate 5 corridor is said by agencies to be a handicap when state officials have argued for closure, but evidence clearly suggests there is much to be gained by lifting novice criminals out of the urban setting. Though far from being a "summer camp," Naselle Youth Camp is especially good at showing intercity youth a world of nature that few might otherwise experience. Its long partnership with the Washington Department of Natural Resources has given scores of young men their first time in the Northwest woods, contributing to society by helping fight wildfires, restoring habitat and other worthwhile hard work.

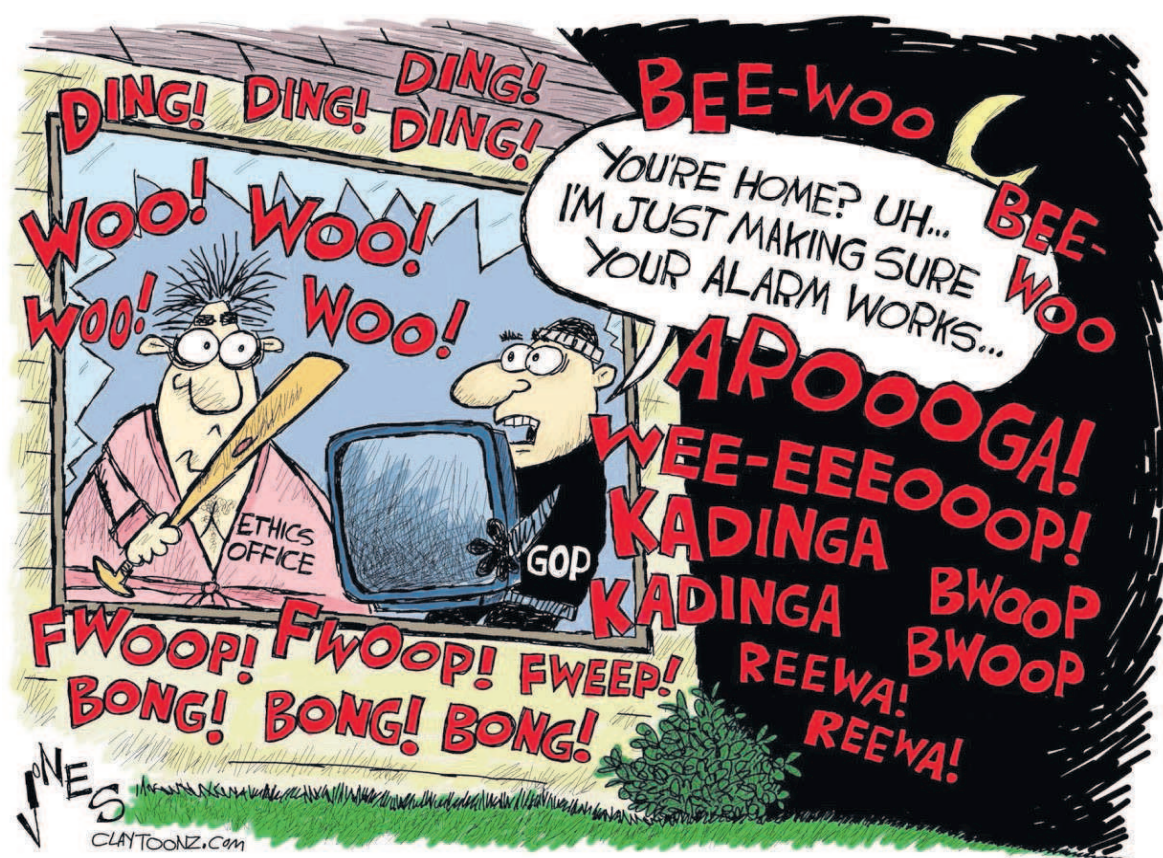
It is impossible to know whether agency administrators and state politicians sincerely believe these youth facilities have lost their reasons for existence, or whether the arguments they make for closure are merely pretexts for spending less on vulnerable young residents. Legislators in both states should deeply inquire into the matter.

Political pawns

There can be little doubt, however, that beyond arguments concerning the functional need for rural-based rehabilitation institutions, state agencies are increasingly "circling their wagons" in Salem and Portland and Olympia and Seattle — protecting urban staff and spending at the expense of less-populous and -powerful rural counties. Where there once was a strategy of spreading state facilities and the economic benefits associated with them throughout counties, powerful bureaucracies now appear more intent on preserving headquarters staffing and convenience. The North Coast Youth Correctional Facility was targeted for closure by Oregon officials in 2003, but was reopened later the same year, while Washington's Juvenile Justice Administration has also been overtly striving to eliminate Naselle Youth Camp for more than a decade.

State facilities obviously must make sense in their own right, but these closures are stabs in the hearts of fragile small-town economies. Local economic needs shouldn't ever be the sole driver of state facility decisions, but here in Naselle Youth Camp we are speaking about one of the top five employers in a chronically depressed county, a facility that functions well. Its closure would threaten the viability of Naselle-Grays River Valley School District, which oversees NYC's separate high school. In Warrenton, there are 45 full-time equivalent jobs connected with the North Coast facility. All this must be taken into consideration.

It is time to end threatening the Warrenton and Naselle facilities over and over again. They make sense and should cease being used as political pawns.



Trump's bad example for the House

By FRANK BRUNI

New York Times News Service

Donald Trump rightly reprimanded House Republicans on Tuesday for their move to disembowel the Office of Congressional Ethics, but let's not be duped or dumb. This was like a crackhead dad fuming at his kids for smoking a little weed.

Their conduct hardly measured up to his, which obviously encouraged it. When they look at him, here's what they see: a presidential candidate who broke with decades of precedent by refusing to release his tax returns and thus shine a light on his conflicts of interest. A president-elect who has yet to spell out how he would eliminate those conflicts — and who has, instead, repeatedly reminded reporters and voters that he's under no explicit legal obligation to eliminate them at all. A plutocrat whose children have toggled back and forth between his government activities and his corporate interests, raising questions about the separation of the two.

Is it any wonder that House Republicans felt OK about trying to slip free of some of their own ethical shackles, no matter how ugly the optics?

Finger wagging

The story here isn't what, specifically, they attempted to do. Nor is it their abandonment of the plan once the media gasped and their dear leader wagged his finger at them.

It's the tone that Trump has set and the culture that he's creating. He operates with an in-your-face defiance, so these House Republicans did, too. He puts his own desires and comfort first, so they reserved the

right to do the same. With more than a few of his Cabinet picks, he demonstrated little sense of fidelity to what he promised voters and even less concern about appearances. House Republicans decided to treat themselves to a taste of that freedom.

In this instance, they were slapped down, though I sincerely doubt that they came away from the confrontation with the feeling that Trump had higher standards than they imagined. No, they just realized that he's even more hypocritical and inconstant than they expected.

The Office of Congressional Ethics is no model operation. Democrats as well as Republicans have chafed at what some of them see as its occasional overzealousness and disregard for due process. Had House Republicans called for a bipartisan and transparent review of its role and tactics, they might not have encountered all that much resistance.

But that's not what happened. In a secretive closed-door meeting late Monday, before the first official day of the new Congress, the House Republican Conference voted to diminish the office's power and independence. This was dark-of-night, no-prying-eyes stuff, done over the objections of Paul Ryan, the House speaker, who could sense how disastrously it would play in the media.

After it played precisely that disastrously, Trump sent out two tweets Tuesday morning asking why House Republicans would take aim at the ethics office when there was so much other important work to do. House Republicans then dropped the plan.

Chaos to come

The whole mess said a whole lot about the chaotic days to come. Although Ryan on Tuesday was re-elected to his leadership post, his grip on his caucus isn't exactly a firm

one. And the wires between Trump and House Republicans are evidently crossed.

For that matter, the wires between Trump and Kellyanne Conway are as well: Mere hours before he tweeted his disapproval of what the Republicans were doing, she appeared on "Good Morning America" and defended their actions as part of the "mandate" — her word, or rather hallucination — that they and Trump had received from voters to shake things up.

I suppose that gutting the ethics office would indeed qualify as a shake-up. But so would declaring Thursdays in the Senate to be clothing-optional or having the Rockettes perform during the State of the Union. Not all shake-ups are created equal.

And turning "mandate" into a mantra, which is a favorite Republican tactic right now, doesn't turn it into a truth. There's no mandate here, not when Hillary Clinton received roughly 3 million more votes than Trump did. Not when there are lingering questions about meddling that may have worked in Trump's favor. Not when the Republicans' majorities in the Senate and House just shrank. Not when their edge in the House owes more to gerrymandering than to any tidal wave of demonstrable enthusiasm for their agenda.

I'm not disputing the election results or Republicans' right — heck, their obligation — to seize the reins of leadership. I'm arguing against the shamelessness of what they just tried to do with the ethics office.

And I'm pleading that Trump stop behaving in a way that sets the stage for it. The new Congress — the new Washington — will be no more or less swampy than its new top gator. Best that he wash away his own muck.

Tech from hands to heads to hearts

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

New York Times News Service

Software has started writing poetry, sports stories and business news. IBM's Watson is co-writing pop hits. Uber has begun deploying self-driving taxis on real city streets and, last month, Amazon delivered its first package by drone to a customer in rural England.

Add it all up and you quickly realize that Donald Trump's election isn't the only thing disrupting society today. The far more profound disruption is happening in the workplace and in the economy at large, as the relentless march of technology has brought us to a point where machines and software are not just outworking us but starting to out-think us in more and more realms.

To reflect on this rapid change, I sat down with my teacher and friend Dov Seidman, CEO of LRN, which advises companies on leadership and how to build ethical cultures, for his take.

"What we are experiencing today bears striking similarities in size and implications to the scientific revolution that began in the 16th century," said Seidman. "The discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo, which spurred that scientific revolution, challenged our whole understanding of the world around and beyond us — and forced us as humans to rethink our place within it."

Once scientific methods became enshrined, we used science and reason to navigate our way for-

ward, he added, so much so that "the French philosopher René Descartes crystallized this age of reason in one phrase: 'I think, therefore I am.'" Descartes' point, said Seidman, "was that it was our ability to 'think' that most distinguished humans from all other animals on earth."

Tech revolution

The technological revolution of the 21st century is as consequential as the scientific revolution, argued Seidman, and it is "forcing us to answer a most profound question — one we've never had to ask before: 'What does it mean to be human in the age of intelligent machines?'"

In short: If machines can compete with people in thinking, what makes us humans unique? And what will enable us to continue to create social and economic value? The answer, said Seidman, is the one thing machines will never have: "a heart."

"It will be all the things that the heart can do," he explained. "Humans can love, they can have compassion, they can dream. While humans can act from fear and anger, and be harmful, at their most elevated, they can inspire and be virtuous. And while machines can reliably interoperate, humans, uniquely, can build deep relationships of trust."

Therefore, Seidman added, our highest self-conception needs to be redefined from "I think, therefore I am" to "I care, therefore I am; I hope, therefore I am; I imagine, therefore I am. I am ethical, therefore I am. I have a purpose, there-

fore I am. I pause and reflect, therefore I am."

We will still need manual labor, and people will continue working with machines to do extraordinary things. Seidman is simply arguing that the tech revolution will force humans to create more value with hearts and between hearts. I agree. When machines and software control more and more of our lives, people will seek out more human-to-human connections — all the things you can't download but have to upload the old-fashioned way, one human to another.

Seidman reminded me of a Talmudic adage: "What comes from the heart, enters the heart." Which is why even jobs that still have a large technical component will benefit from more heart. I call these STEM-path jobs — jobs that combine STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) skills with human empathy, like the doctor who can extract the best diagnosis from IBM's Watson on cancer and then best relate it to a patient.

It's no surprise that the French government began requiring French companies on Jan. 1 to guarantee their employees a "right to disconnect" from technology — when they are not at work — trying to combat the "always on" work culture.

Leaders, businesses and communities will still leverage technology to gain advantage, but those that put human connection at the center of everything they do — and how they do it — will be the enduring winners, insisted Seidman. "Machines can be programmed to do the next thing right. But only humans can do the next right thing."