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OUR VIEW

Crab season isn't ill fated, but it needs attention

Some may wonder if the 2017 Dungeness crab season is ill-fated: First delayed by weeks to make certain crab were free of domoic acid toxin, delayed again after processors proposed lowering the price paid to crabbers, and then it started with a capsizing that could have cost five lives except for quick intervention by the Ballard.

Today's crabbers and fishermen have to be smart and rational to survive — literally and economically.

Crab around the mouth of the Columbia this season never exceeded safe levels of marine toxin, but the industry is united in striving to preserve the reputation of Dungeness crab as a pure, premium product. For this reason alone, it's sensible to take every precaution.

Delays in the season also often have strategic components involving jockeying over price, and competition over crabbing grounds. Sometimes crabbers wait to allow an early-season storm to pass. In this instance, the closure went longer than most anyone wanted.

Missing the holiday celebrations when crab are a popular menu option led to downward pressure on the ex-vessel price. Beyond this, some West Coast processors and fishermen have been playing hard ball for generations, with the situation becoming more pronounced with monopolization on the processor side. As a society, we should always advocate for fair compensation for all economic players.

Danger in the Dungeness fishery is infamous. The risks all argue for decent paydays and for continuing scrutiny of safety measures.

It must be said that many crabbers resent and distrust outside efforts to intervene in how the fishery is conducted. Deference is warranted in such a specialized field. However, it must be wondered whether there are ways to improve crabbing's cost/benefit ratio. It is inherently hazardous to make a mad dash out into the wild Pacific over one of the world's most notorious river bars in the middle of storm season. Regulators and the industry must continue trying to minimize risks and maximize local economic benefits.

There is a popular saying making the rounds of local social media: "Fishermen's lives matter." They do indeed. We owe it to them to be supportive.

Public records reforms need continuing attention, action

If Oregonians have a shared self-image, it's that we may see inside our state and local governments. These days that expectation is often thwarted, if not challenged.

We on the Lower Columbia River got an education in how a misguided governor could assume a proprietary attitude toward his office. At the close of Gov. John Kitzhaber's third term, he unilaterally moved to ban gillnet fishing on the Columbia. It was an opaque process that defied logical, scientific explanation.

Following Kitzhaber's resignation, there was a welter of requests for communications that occurred behind the wall of the governor's suite. Our newspaper group made requests regarding the gestation of the gillnet decision.

The essence of why access to public records matter is this: Citizens pay for this government and it's not the property of those who come and go in its leadership.

Kitzhaber's successor, Gov. Kate Brown, routinely invokes transparency and ethics as an applause line.

Meanwhile, the substantive work on public records reform is happening within a task force convened by Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum. The reality which the task force confronts includes the some 550 exemptions to the public records statute. Another reality is fee-creep. Many agencies charge onerous fees for producing records.

Among the significant preliminary recommendations the AG's task force has issued is to set a time limit for agencies' response to records requests.

Task force members must grasp the complexity of what they confront, but they must not use that complexity as an excuse for inertia. In a recent article, task force member Jeb Bladine noted that the 550 exemptions to the public records statute cropped up one at a time, over 50 years. It would be unrealistic, he said, to expect they could be swept away all at once.

Attorney General Rosenblum in a Monday interview noted that the proliferation of electronic records is a new, complicating factor. "Now we're buckling under the strain of technology and a law that's creaking along," she said.

The task force's first steps are encouraging. The key to making real change is tenacity. Rosenblum and her task force must have staying power, and their recommendations need serious legislative action.



Tipping point: online and scared

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN
New York Times News Service

And so it came to pass that in the winter of 2016 the world hit a tipping point that was revealed by the most unlikely collection of actors: Vladimir Putin, Jeff Bezos, Donald Trump, Mark Zuckerberg and the Macy's department store. Who'd have



think it?

And what was this tipping point? It was the moment when we realized that a critical mass of our lives and work had shifted away from the terrestrial world to a realm known as "cyberspace." That is to say, a critical mass of our interactions had moved to a realm where we're all connected but no one's in charge.

After all, there are no stoplights in cyberspace, no police officers walking the beat, no courts, no judges, no God who smites evil and rewards good, and certainly no "1-800-Call-If-Putin-Hacks-Your-Election." If someone slimes you on Twitter or Facebook, well, unless it is a death threat, good luck getting it removed, especially if it is done anonymously, which in cyberspace is quite common.

Hours of our day

And yet this realm is where we now spend increasing hours of our day. Cyberspace is now where we do more of our shopping, more of our dating, more of our friendship-making and sustaining, more of our learning, more of our commerce, more of our teaching, more of our communicating, more of our news-broadcasting and news-seeking, and more of our selling of goods, services and ideas.

It's where both our president-elect and the leader of ISIS can communicate with equal ease with tens of millions of their respective followers through Twitter — without editors, fact-checkers, libel lawyers or other filters.

And, I would argue, 2016 will be remembered as the year when we fully grasped just how scary that can be — how easy it was for a presidential candidate to tweet out untruths and half-truths faster than anyone could correct them, how cheap it was for Russia to intervene on Trump's behalf with hacks of Democratic operatives' computers and how unnerving it was to hear Yahoo's chief information security officer, Bob Lord, say that his company still had "not been able to identify" how 1 billion Yahoo accounts and their sensitive user information were hacked in 2013.

Even President Barack Obama was taken aback by the speed at which this tipping point tipped. "I think that I underestimated the degree to which, in this new information age, it is possible for misinformation, for cyberhacking and so forth, to have an impact on our open societies," he told ABC News' "This Week."

At Christmas, Amazon.com taught yet more traditional retailers how hard the cybertipping point has hit retailing. Last week, Macy's said it was slashing 10,000 jobs and closing dozens of stores because, according to The Wall Street Journal, "Macy's hasn't been able to solve consumers' shift to online shopping."

At first Zuckerberg, the Facebook founder, insisted that fake news stories carried by Facebook "surely had no impact" on the election and that saying so was "a pretty crazy idea." But in a very close election it was not crazy at all.

Facebook — which wants all the readers and advertisers of the mainstream media but not to be saddled with its human editors and fact-checkers — is now taking more seriously its responsibilities as a news purveyor in cyberspace.

Critical mass

Alan S. Cohen, chief commercial officer of the cybersecurity firm Illumio (I am a small shareholder), noted in an interview on siliconAn-

gle.com that the reason this tipping point tipped now was because so many companies, governments, universities, political parties and individuals have concentrated a critical mass of their data in enterprise data centers and cloud computing environments.

Ten years ago, Cohen said, bad guys did not have the capabilities to get at all this data and extract it, but "now they do," and as more creative tools like big data and artificial intelligence get "weaponized," this will become an even bigger problem. It's a huge legal, moral and strategic problem, and it will require, Cohen said, "a new social compact" to defuse.

Work on that compact has to start with every school teaching children digital civics. And that begins with teaching them that the internet is an open sewer of untreated, unfiltered information, where they need to bring skepticism and critical thinking to everything they read and basic civic decency to everything they write.

A Stanford Graduate School of Education study published in November found "a dismaying inability by students to reason about information they see on the internet. Students, for example, had a hard time distinguishing advertisements from news articles or identifying where information came from. ... One assessment required middle schoolers to explain why they might not trust an article on financial planning that was written by a bank executive and sponsored by a bank. The researchers found that many students did not cite authorship or article sponsorship as key reasons for not believing the article."

Prof. Sam Wineburg, the lead author of the report, said: "Many people assume that because young people are fluent in social media they are equally perceptive about what they find there. Our work shows the opposite to be true."

In an era when more and more of our lives have moved to this digital realm, that is downright scary.

Cold War relic, present-day threat

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — You can kick the can down the road, but when Kim Jong Un announces, as he did last Sunday, that "we have reached the final stage in preparations to test-launch an intercontinental ballistic rocket," you are reaching the end of that road.

Since the early 1990s, we have offered every kind of inducement to get North Korea to give up its nuclear program. All failed miserably. Pyongyang managed to extort money, food, oil and commercial nuclear reactors in exchange. But it was all a swindle. North Korea was never going to give up its nukes because it sees them as the ultimate guarantee of regime survival.

The North Koreans believe that nukes confer inviolability. Saddam Hussein was invaded and deposed before he could acquire them. Kim won't let that happen to him. That's why Thae Yong Ho, a recent high-level defector, insisted that "As long as Kim Jong Un is in power, North Korea will never give up its nuclear weapons, even if it's offered \$1 trillion or \$10 trillion in rewards." Meanwhile, they have advanced.

They've already exploded a handful of nuclear bombs. And they've twice successfully launched satellites, which means they have the ICBM essentials. If they can miniaturize their weapons to fit on top of the rocket and control re-entry, they'll be able to push a button in Pyongyang and wipe out an American city.

The options

The options are stark: (1) Pre-emptive attack on its missile launching facilities. Doable but reckless. It is the option most likely to trigger an actual war. The North Koreans enjoy both conventional superiority and proximity: a vast army poised at the Demilitarized Zone only 30 miles from Seoul. Americans are not going to fight another land war in Asia.

(2) Shoot down the test ICBM, as advocated by The Wall Street Journal. Assuming we can. Democrats have done their best to abort or slow down anti-missile defenses since Ronald Reagan proposed them in the early 1980s. Even so, we should be able to intercept a single, relatively primitive ICBM of the sort North Korea might be capable of. Such a red line could be a powerful deterrent.

(3) Return tactical U.S. nuclear weapons to South Korea. They were withdrawn in 1991 by George H.W. Bush in the waning days of the Cold War. Gorbachev's Soviet Union

responded in kind. A good idea in general, but not on the Korean Peninsula. Pyongyang had railed constantly against their presence, but they did act as a deterrent to any contemplated North Korean aggression. Which might make them a useful bargaining chip.

(4) Economic leverage on China, upon which Pyongyang depends for its survival. Donald Trump seems to suggest using trade to pressure China to get North Korea to desist. The problem is that China has shown no evidence of being willing to yield a priceless strategic asset — a wholly dependent client state that acts as a permanent thorn and distraction to U.S. power in the Pacific Rim — because of mere economic pressure.

The principal strategic challenge facing the United States is the rise of revisionist powers — Russia, China and Iran — striving to expel American influence from their regions. In comparison, the Korean problem is minor, an idiosyncratic relic of the Cold War. North Korea should be a strategic afterthought, like Cuba. And it would be if not for its nukes.

That's a big if. A wholly unpredictable, highly erratic and often irrational regime is acquiring the capacity to destroy an American city by missile. That's an urgent problem.

North Korea may be just an unexploded ordnance of a long-concluded Cold War. But we cannot keep assuming it will never go off.