

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## OUR VIEW



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Clay Williams high-fives students at John Jacob Astor Elementary along with other students from Astoria High School's 2016 graduating class during their celebratory graduation walk last year.

## Graduation rates are ticking up, but need improvement

The state Department of Education released its newest data on four-year graduation rates last week, and the news came with mixed blessings.

Statewide, the Class of 2016 had a graduation rate of 74.8 percent, up a full percentage point from 2015, and three points more than 2014. State officials, including Gov. Kate Brown, lauded the continued improvement.

But the mixed blessing of the overall uptick is that it still leaves Oregon, which ranked 48th in the country in 2015 in awarding four-year diplomas, woefully far behind the national average of 83 percent and ahead of only Nevada and New Mexico. Most other states have not yet released their 2016 data for a more recent comparison. But the new numbers show the dramatic and continuing need for educational improvement and sustainable funding, especially since the state has set an ambitious goal of attaining a 100 percent graduation rate by 2025. In 2015, the states at the top of the national list with the highest rankings posted 90 percent four-year graduation rates.

In Clatsop County, only the Jewell School District — which has the lowest enrollment and only awarded 10 of 12 possible diplomas in 2016 — had a graduation rate above the state average. The county's largest school district, Astoria, with a student enrollment of about 1,800, saw its graduation rate drop 1.97 percentage points to 72.68 percent in 2016 from 74.83 percent in the 2014-15 school year. The Seaside School District's rate also fell by 1.03 points, from 75.41 percent in 2014-15 to 74.38 percent this past year. On the upside, the Warrenton-Hammond School District improved by 5.15 points from 69.09 percent in 2014-15 to 74.24 percent this past year and the Knappa School District rose by 3.6 points, from 66.67 percent in 2014-15 to 70.27 percent this past year. For the Warrenton-Hammond District it marked the sixth consecutive year of graduation improvement and Superintendent Mark Jeffery and the district's educators should be congratulated for their continuing progress.

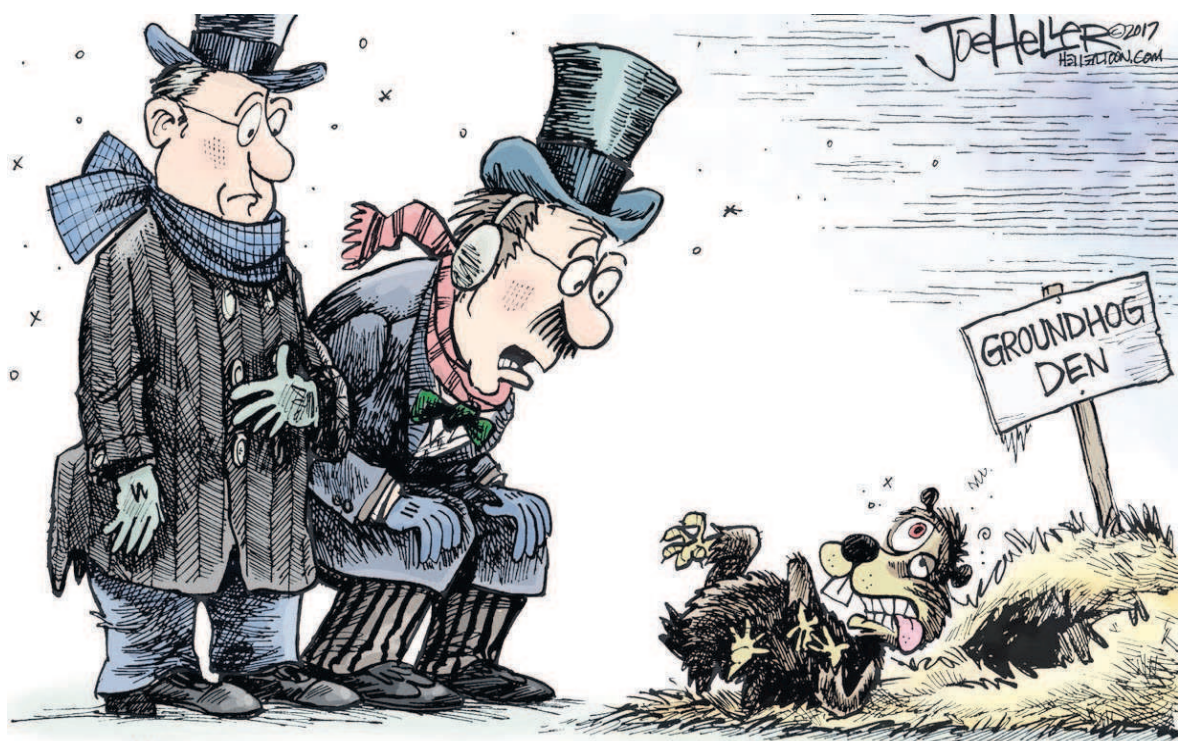
The numbers, though, show the obvious need for improvement, especially in rural areas like the North Coast.

State funding from the voter-approved Measure 98 may help, as Astoria Superintendent Craig Hoppes points out. Hoppes says educators are focusing on how much money the county's school districts will receive from the measure, which was pitched to voters as a support mechanism to improve the state's graduation rate. The measure, if legislators follow through with the voters' mandate, is expected to pump approximately \$800 per student into adding career-technical offerings, providing more college credit courses in high school and supporting dropout prevention programs. Hoppes and others believe the career-technical offerings will help draw interest from students who may otherwise drop out to pursue work.

Joint planning for that enhanced career-technical curriculum should be a priority at the local districts so that the programs can get a jump start when the state does provide the funding for the next school year.

At the state level, when the rate figures were released Gov. Brown made clear that graduation improvement is a priority, saying, "I remain committed to improving Oregon's graduation rates, and will prioritize investments in the upcoming legislative session that empower communities and educators to improve graduation rates, particularly for historically underserved and rural communities."

That legislative session began Wednesday, and it's time for the governor and the state's senators and representatives to work together to provide the needed funding for our children's education and future.



"HE'S BEEN HIBERNATING SINCE OCTOBER... APPARENTLY CATCHING UP ON THE NEWS WAS TOO MUCH TO HANDLE!"

## How populism stumbles

By ROSS DOUTHAT  
*New York Times News Service*

Populisms vary, but their genesis is generally the same. Some set of ideas commands public support but lacks purchase in elite policy debates.

Then a combination of elite failure and popular pressure makes that tension ripe for exploitation, and some new figure or movement emerges, promising to follow the will of the people and override the ruling class.

Donald Trump is obviously such a figure, and his freeze on refugee admissions to the United States is one of those ideas. Just as most Americans favor lower immigration levels than the bipartisan immigration deals hatched in Washington, D.C., envision, many Americans are doubtful about admitting large numbers of refugees from terrorism-scarred countries. Trump's primary-season proposal to temporarily bar all Muslims from entering the United States had only minority support. But when he shifted to advocating a refugee freeze and country-by-country restrictions, he was on more solid populist ground.

So it's not surprising that he's attempting to keep this promise. It's also not surprising that it's been a mess.

This is not because the basic idea is infinitely beyond the pale. I oppose the Trump refugee freeze because I think the United States has a particular moral obligation to help people in Iraq and Syria given our own blundering actions in the region. I also don't see strong evidence the refugee program was creating a major terrorism risk, or threatening to create the kind of unassimilable enclaves that Europe is dealing with today. The temporary freeze on travel from seven Muslim-majority countries might make sense if the Trump administration had a brilliant new vetting procedure in mind, but there's little evidence of that.

At the same time, all refugee policies involve limits, most refugees need to be helped much closer to home, not every refugee population will have an easy time adapting to American life, and the annual ceiling in Trump's order — 50,000 — is still close to the number of refugees admitted in most years of the Obama and Bush presidencies.

Moreover, some of the details of the Trump policy are perfectly defensible. The proposed preference for religious minorities, for instance, has been attacked as Christian chauvinism. But the reality is that Middle Eastern Christians (and Yazidis, and other groups) are often in a particularly desperate position — facing, for instance, persecution within refugee camps — and deserve more help than our efforts have afforded them to date.

None of this is to minimize the cruelty involved in narrowing the doorway for refugees. But foreign policy is a realm of cruel choices, and it is not clear that the suffering caused by a narrower gate for refugees is obviously worse than the suffering caused by drone strikes and bombing runs and "kinetic military actions," all policies that consistently command bipartisan support.

So why the weekend frenzy, the screaming headlines, the surge of protest? Because of several features inherent to populism, which tend to undermine its attempts to govern no matter the on-paper popularity of its ideas.

First, populism finds its voice by



Matt Masin/The Orange County Register

More than a hundred people listen as speakers come to the microphone during a protest and vigil at the University of California, Irvine, on Tuesday against President Donald Trump.

pushing against the boundaries of acceptable opinion. But in the process it often embraces bigotries and extremisms that in turn color the reception of its policies.

In this case, it's Trump's original "Muslim ban" forays (and the clash-of-civilizations rhetoric of his inner circle) that has shaped how his freeze has been received. His defenders may protest that most Islamic-majority countries are not affected, that any counterterrorism policy will disproportionately affect Muslims, and that the White House order draws on a list of countries that President Barack Obama targeted for (much more modest) visa restrictions. All of this is true, but still ... Donald Trump ran for president calling for a temporary ban on Muslims. Once he crossed that line (and many others), it became inevitable that any move like this would be seen as a second-best path to religious discrimination, and resisted fiercely and understandably on those grounds.

**But what we've watched unfold with refugee policy suggests that chaos and incompetence are much more likely to define this administration than any kind of ruthless strength.**

Second, having campaigned against elites and experts and all their pomps and works, populists imagine that their zeal can carry all before it, that proceduralism and institutional knowledge are for losers and toadies and men with soft hands, and that a few guys in the White House can execute a major overhaul of a delicate system without bureaucratic patience or rhetorical finesse.

This assumption is deeply mistaken — for reasons evident this weekend — in the chaotic scenes at airports, the spectacle of people already in transit being turned away, the crazy attempt to apply the ban to permanent residents, the absence of obvious carve-outs and exceptions, the failure to get adequate buy-in or advice from Cabinet officials, and

the blowback from Trump's political allies as well as his opponents.

Then, finally, because populism thrives on its willingness to shatter norms, it tends to treat this chaos and blowback as a kind of vindication — a sign that it's on the right track, that its boldness is meeting inevitable resistance from the failed orthodoxies of the past, and so on through a self-comforting litany. That makes it hard for populists to course correct, because they get stuck in a "the worse the better" loop, reassuring themselves that they're making progress when actually they're cratering.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the divide, the ascent of populism also creates an unusual level of solidarity among elites, who feel moved to resist on a scale that they wouldn't if similar policies were pursued by normal political actors. Thus Trump, not even two weeks into his presidency, has already faced unusual pushback from the intelligence community, the Justice Department, the State Department and other regions of the bureaucracy, even as the media-entertainment complex unites against him on a scale unseen even in previous Republican administrations, and the Democratic Party is pressured into scorched-earth opposition before policy negotiations are even joined. These tensions ratcheted up over the weekend; it's difficult to see how they ratchet down.

The great fear among Trump-fearers is that he will deal with this elite opposition by effectively crushing it — purging the deep state, taming the media, remaking the judiciary as his pawn, and routing or co-opting the Democrats. This is the scenario where a surging populism, its progress balked through normal channels, turns authoritarian and dictatorial, ending in the sort of American Putinism that David Frum describes darkly in the latest issue of *The Atlantic*.

But nothing about Trumpian populism to date suggests that it has either the political skill or the popularity required to grind its opposition down. In which case, instead of Russia's Vladimir Putin, the more relevant case study might be former President Mohammed Morsi of Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood leader whose brief tenure was defined both by chronic self-sabotage and by the active resistance of the Egyptian bureaucracy and intelligentsia, which rendered governance effectively impossible.

The Egyptian deep state's sabotage of Egypt culminated in a coup. This is not my prediction for the Trump era. But what we've watched unfold with refugee policy suggests that chaos and incompetence are much more likely to define this administration than any kind of ruthless strength.