

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW

Trolley fare too much of a bargain

The Astoria Riverfront Trolley is one of the city's signature attractions, one that adds to Astoria's ambiance even for those who never set foot in Old 300, the well-loved 103-year-old matron of the system. It's important to chart a sensible business strategy that will keep it running long into the future.

Charging \$1 a ride is not going to cut it any longer. Just as legacy phone operators no doubt felt it was traumatic to boost the cost of a local pay phone call from a dime to a quarter in the 1980s, volunteer conductors are attached to the simplicity of a buck a ride. But the system's long-term survival — including building a fund for major maintenance and replacement of trolley components and infrastructure — must take precedence over this particular tradition.

San Francisco cable cars currently charge \$7 a ride, a sum that has not caused rebellion or loss of ridership. It is, admittedly, a much different operation than Astoria's, for example paying conductors an annual average of \$70,548. However, the ability to offer even some compensation during Astoria's peak tourist season — something a higher fare might allow — would go quite some way toward addressing the chronic need for more drivers.

A higher fare, coupled with other possible steps like partnership with local civic groups and businesses, will keep the trolley charming guests and residents for many decades to come.

Immigration reform remains necessary

Immigrants around the mouth of the Columbia River and their employers are expressing increasing anxiety about Trump administration rhetoric on deportations. It's important to place these worries in context, separating truth from myth as the nation feels its way forward toward a new equilibrium on this most fraught of issues.

Some Northwest coastal industries are more reliant than others on immigrant workers. But it's fair to say first-generation Americans — documented and undocumented — are widely dispersed within our economy. Agriculture, shellfish and the hospitality sector particularly depend on hardworking immigrants. In some instances, these jobs pay considerably better than minimum wage, but have undesirable hours or working conditions that don't appeal to native-born Americans with wider options.

While there are few indications that last Thursday's "A Day Without Immigrants" jobs walk-off resulted in serious business disruptions in the Columbia-Pacific counties, there's no doubt that permanent removal of these workers and their families would have serious negative impacts.

Is there reason to be concerned about such a disruption?

Rumors to the contrary, there has so far been little match between the intensity of President Donald Trump's anti-immigrant language and on-the-ground actions by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. For example, in the week of Feb. 5-11, ICE says it arrested 680 individuals in "targeted enforcement operations." None of these publicized arrests occurred in Oregon, Washington state or elsewhere in the Pacific Northwest. (There may have been other minor arrests here that ICE doesn't consider to be a "community arrest," the kind of large-scale bust that creates a corresponding level of hard feelings.)

The 680 number is remarkably consistent with the number of such arrests made in President Barack Obama's first year in office — 675 a week. However, Trump's order targets even those who violated a misdemeanor law against crossing the border illegally, while Obama focused on immigrants convicted of serious crimes, those considered threats to national security, and recent arrivals.

It's possible to believe the U.S. should regulate who comes in and stays here, and yet also believe it would be inhumane and economically self-sabotaging to kick out productive immigrants who hold down jobs and raise kids here. Pragmatically, low-population counties like ours lack the excess workforce to fill the vacancies that would be created by wholesale deportations. Even with its undocumented immigrants, Clatsop County has close to full employment.

There has to be a middle course.

Level-headed Republican and Democratic U.S. senators developed such a compromise years ago — a path to normalization for immigrants committed to decent, long-term lives here. It's time for the nation's business leaders to press our businessman president to recognize the reality of this situation. We must find ways to address labor needs while making sure we know and control who enters the country.

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GUEST COLUMN

Some never make it past the emergency room

By JOSHUA MARQUIS
Special to The Daily Astorian

We have been too eager to declare victory in a war on drugs that never really started.



A recent editorial in The Daily Astorian correctly pointed to the dismal state of Oregon's response to deaths directly caused by illegal drugs.

Another article chronicled the sad journey of Dave and Kerry Strickland, who lost their son, Jordan, to heroin and have had the courage to speak about a battle that touches so many families.

Not coincidentally, another article documented the rigors of getting a new police officer on the road at the Astoria Police Department.

While there has been some progress, together the three articles outline the imperative need for local governments to even more effectively and aggressively address drug abuse and illegal drugs.

Over-prescription of some drugs has been dramatically reduced. Pseudoephedrine was a common off-the-shelf cold medicine that was also crucial to the manufacture of methamphetamine — perhaps the worst of all the drugs. Its catastrophic health consequences include near-immediate addiction and psychotic behavior. Meth cooks bought large batches of the drug from local stores, until Oregon passed legislation making a doctor's prescription necessary for purchase. The "Beavis and Butthead labs," as law enforcement called them, declined to almost zero.

We assumed that meant meth was gone. But that wasn't so. Meth now comes into the United States in 55-gallon drums from international cartels.

The opiate that is killing people now is heroin. Heroin used to cost about \$20 a dose and was far less potent. Today it is sometimes laced with illegally-imported quantities of the super-potent fentanyl, another opiate which has, when medically administered, brought tremendous relief to many (including my own mother) who suffer from severe chronic pain. "Recreational use" is the most ironic of terms for fentanyl-laced heroin, which now sells from \$3 to \$5 a dose and could be

potent enough to kill the first time.

And so, another geopolitical aspect to our drug problems.

Many people addicted to drugs don't end up in the court system. Some people never make it past the emergency room. Clatsop County is exceedingly fortunate to have Dr. Joann Giuliani to serve as our county's medical examiner, not only being on call literally 24/7, but also working with police and the community when tragedies like opiate overdoses take someone's life. Often, she answers the difficult questions families often have about how their child died.

With heroin and meth being bigger business than ever, there is no reason, and no sense, in not addressing both the supply and demand sides of the drug problem.

A solid drug policy would address and provide: low-cost and long-term mental health and drug treatment; a law enforcement team dedicated to drug enforcement; and a practical, viable drug court backed up by the potential of real sanctions and real rewards. All three elements need reinforcement.

Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare has made real progress. Still, mental health treatment is scarce, and Clatsop County has no detox or secure mental health beds. In-patient drug treatment is operated entirely by private providers and remains out of reach for most without better-than-average insurance.

The path to sobriety is not easy, which is why we do not seek revocation of the second chances we extend on most drug possession cases the first few times they admit relapsing. But the threat of even a few days in jail may prompt someone to stay sober, to attend

treatment, and to make it to the next stage in recovery. The people who complete drug court graduate with their case entirely dismissed.

After having founded Clatsop County's Drug Court, Judge Philip Nelson has retired, turning drug court over to our newest judge, Dawn McIntosh. Because of sentencing guidelines, which judges are required to follow, it is literally impossible for someone to face prison for drug possession, no matter how bad their record or how many prior similar convictions they have racked up.

Not that most drug addicts belong in prison. Oregon has one of the lowest rates of imprisoning drug felons, at less than 10% of the state prison population. There is even a badly-conceived effort in this legislative session to reduce all possession cases from felonies to misdemeanors, further minimizing the actual harm done to users, their family, and the community. If the possibility of "earning away" a possible felony conviction, even without the threat of prison, is further eroded, then we can expect drug court applicants to dry to next to zero, as they have in California and other states that took this ill-advised step.

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The Clatsop County Drug Team allows police to focus on higher-level dealers, cutting off the supply much more effectively. It would have vanished long ago but for the determination of Sheriff Tom Bergin, who once ran the team as a detective. In its best years there were detectives from Astoria, Seaside, the Sheriff's Office, and even the Oregon State Police. Draconian budget cuts have worn down the State Police for years and took away OSP's detective. The years that Astoria Police participated were among the most productive. The City of Astoria should dedicate an officer to the drug team, in addition to its current needs.

We owe it to Dave, Kerry and Jordan Strickland, and the many others who have suffered under what The Daily Astorian called "this blight," to do these basic steps to make Clatsop County a better place.

Joshua Marquis is the Clatsop County district attorney.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Shared housing

In light of the recent discussions around housing in Clatsop County, I would like to put forth an option, whose origins extend back to neolithic times. Namely, co-operative housing. Which can be defined as three or more people, unrelated by blood, who share a domicile.

Astoria itself has a rich history of boarding houses, which could be considered a form of co-operative housing. There are many very successful examples of co-ops from around the country we can look to, from co-op apartment buildings in Manhattan to co-operative mobile home parks in Montana. Working people banding together to cre-

ate housing for themselves. Another common example can be found in student co-operatives, which have been creating affordable housing on campuses nationwide — from Boston to Eugene — for a century.

Shared housing has many benefits. They can be set up with just a handful of people, or be on a much larger scale as seen on university campuses with co-ops that house 30 or more students. When paired with land trusts, co-ops can remove property from the speculative real estate market, thereby guaranteeing affordable worker housing into the future. Within co-ops, residents have a stake in the game, shared ownership encourages stewardship of the house — which can some-

times be lacking in rental units.

When properties come into the possession of the county perhaps we, as a community, might consider using them as a resource to create housing for our workers, rather than auction them at below market rate to investors.

I invite anyone who might be interested in pursuing, or supporting, co-operative housing in Clatsop County to a brief event at Blue Scorcher Bakery & Cafe from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Wednesday. The goal of the gathering is to define the next steps in the pursuit of grassroots affordable housing in Clatsop County.

IRIS SULLIVAN DAIRE
 Astoria