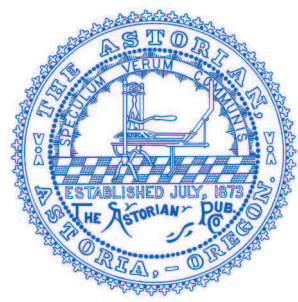


# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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## OUR VIEW

### Trump budget cuts to Coast Guard and NOAA raise alarms

New presidential administrations inevitably have different spending priorities. Particularly when the White House switches political parties, such reexaminations are expected and encouraged. Call it what you will — draining the swamp, sweeping out the cobwebs — but citizens understand the advisability of getting fresh eyes into leadership positions.

At the state level, it can be observed that decades of one-party control of governors' offices can lead to entrenched patterns of decision-making and a failure to rigorously challenge assumptions. Here in the Pacific Northwest, the fact Democrats have held Oregon's governorship since January 1987 and Washington's since January 1985 comes with a long-term institutional mindset that not all find to their liking. If nothing else, electing a Republican would give voters a baseline for comparing different approaches.

Priorities of the Donald Trump administration are starting to take shape, upending not just eight years of agenda-setting by a Democratic White House, but also challenging long-held priorities espoused by a majority in Congress. Some of these upcoming choices will have direct consequences in our area. It behooves us to pay close attention. Beyond revisions in national healthcare laws — a subject that will dominate political debates for months or years to come — potential cuts to the U.S. Coast Guard, the National Weather Service and federal fisheries programs deserve close scrutiny in a place that is closely intertwined in all three.

#### 'Great Wall'

Emphasizing that nothing is settled and Congress has ultimate control over spending, cuts to the Coast Guard are worrying. Columbia River communities rely on the Coast Guard in ways well beyond its most obvious maritime safety, search and rescue roles. Not least, Sector Columbia River is a massive part of our economy — protecting 420 miles of coast, 465 miles of inland rivers and 33 ports with an active-duty workforce of 500, plus 105 reserve, 29 civilian and 890 volunteer Auxiliary personnel.

To free money for his "Great Wall," Trump is eyeing a 14 percent cut in Coast Guard spending, subtracting \$1.3 billion from its 2017-18 budget. A considerable percentage of these cuts would come from canceling a \$500 million contract for a ninth National Security Cutter — an expense others have also questioned. But other Coast Guard budget cuts detailed in a plan obtained by the Washington Post would impact drug-interdiction patrols and other national security and law enforcement activities in which our local Coast Guard plays an integral part.

Trump's reported 17 percent cut to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration — of which the National Weather Service is a part — would have a large impact on several programs of intense local interest.

"I am extremely concerned about the proposed elimination of the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund, the Ocean Acidification Program, the NOAA estuary research program, the tsunami preparedness grant funding, the Sea Grant program, and other severe cuts," U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Washington, said. We ought to all share her concerns on these matters.

#### Fired up

Writing for Seattle PI.com, Joel Connelly provides valuable context for how devastating these cuts would be, and suggests that our region's congressional delegation should be fired up to resist them.

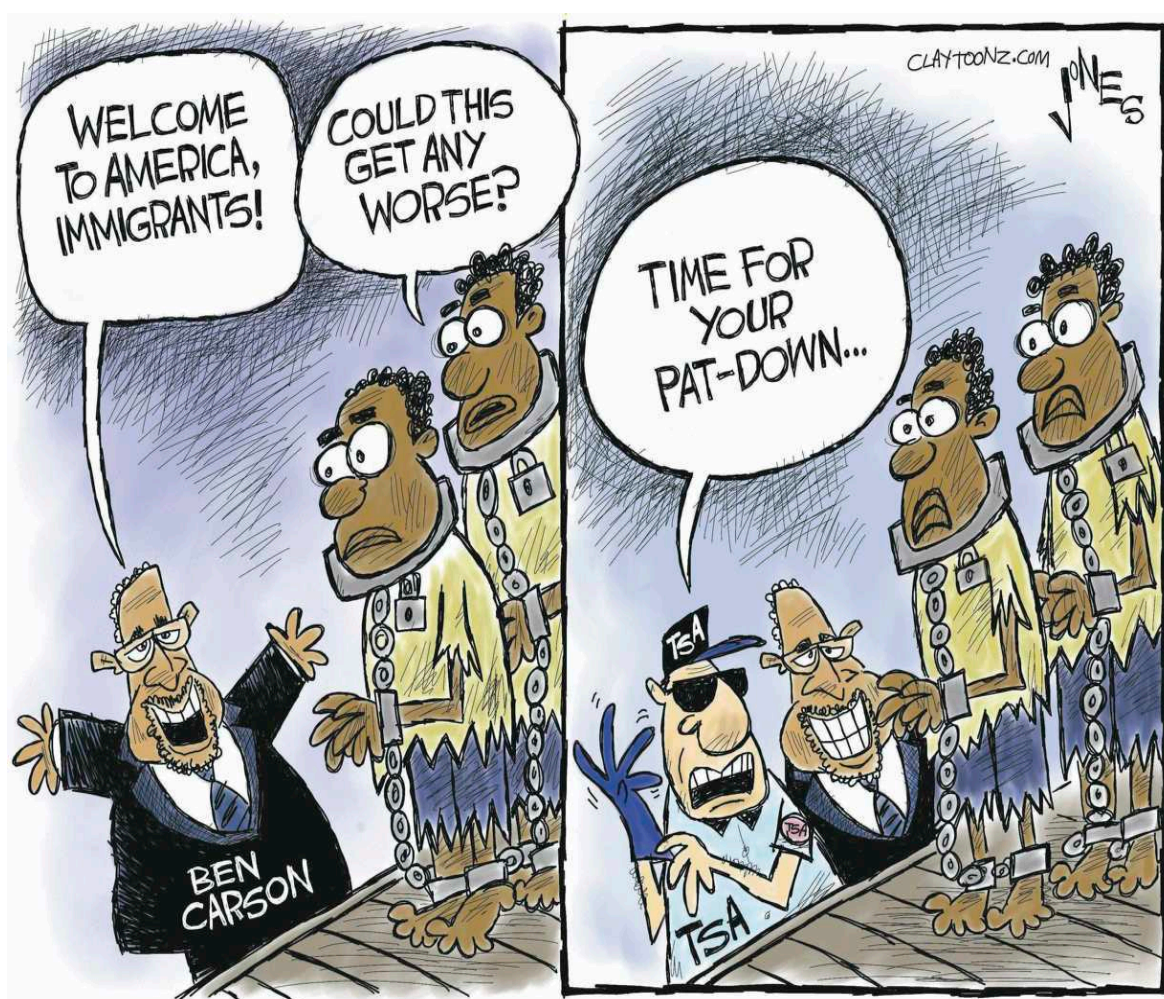
"The Trump administration is planning a tsunami of budget cuts to the federal government's chief climate science agency, gutting Northwest programs from Pacific Coast salmon recovery to ocean weather buoys, to preparation for tsunamis," Connelly reported. Axing the Sea Grant program — long exemplified in our area by the esteemed Jim Bergeron — would subtract millions from rural coastal economies, while cutting acidification work would undercut the vital shellfish and crab industries on the Oregon and Washington coast.

Connelly points out both U.S. House members representing the Washington Coast — Republican Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler and Democratic Rep. Derek Kilmer — serve on the House Appropriations Committee. U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, and U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Washington, serve on the U.S. Senate's spending panel. All can and must fight to preserve the budgets of agencies vital to our coast.

Citizens can help by contacting members of Congress and the White House and letting them know we support this spending that is so essential to our safety and economic wellbeing.

Yes, by all means drain the swamp. But don't hide behind reformist rhetoric while killing or wounding federal agencies we greatly rely on.

**Don't hide behind reformist rhetoric while killing or wounding federal agencies we greatly rely on.**



### Ben Carson's gray matter

By FRANK BRUNI

*New York Times News Service*

I need Ben Carson in my head. In my hippocampus, to be exact.

According to Carson, the human brain stores a perfect, indelible record of everything that it has seen, heard and done, and if he just drilled a hole through my skull and planted electrodes in the right region, bingo! I'd have access to the whole wondrous trove.

Drill, baby, drill. I need the access. As things stand now, I lose 45 minutes every week to the retrieval of forgotten passwords, and I recently got three-quarters of the way through a mystery before realizing that I knew whodunit, how he dun it and why he dun it. I'd already read the book.

Carson, our brand-new housing secretary, made an introductory, supposedly inspirational speech to federal employees this week, and while this kind of thing normally doesn't wind up in the news, there's nothing normal about Carson.

During the speech, he went on the tangent about the brain that I just described, and while, granted, he's a renowned neurosurgeon and I'm an expert on little more than semicolons, I do question his assertion that with proper cerebral stimulation, someone can "recite back to you verbatim a book they read 60 years ago." Maybe "Green Eggs and Ham." But "The Mill on the Floss"?

Several of Carson's fellow brain experts scoffed at this claim, although there was much louder scoffing at a subsequent stretch of his remarks that described America as a magnet for dreamers who arrived with "all of their earthly belongings in their two hands, not knowing what this country held for them."

He continued:

"There were other immigrants who came here in the bottom of slave ships, worked even longer, even harder, for less. But they too had a dream that one day their sons, daughters, grandsons, granddaughters, great-grandsons, great-granddaughters, might pursue prosperity and happiness in this land."

Sometimes Twitter goes berserk because it's Twitter, other times because it should. "Their dream?" tweeted movie director Ava DuVernay. "Not be kidnapped, tortured, raped."

I was transfixed by "even longer, even harder, for less." Not to be a stickler, but that doesn't quite cover



AP Photo/Susan Walsh

Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson speaks to HUD employees in Washington, D.C., on Monday.

the distance between the sweatshop and the plantation.

On ABC's talk show "The View," Whoopi Goldberg recalled previous odd statements by Carson, noting that "the man who thought the pyramids were built for grain silos" and who "called the Big Bang theory ridiculous" was back with "a brand-new epic."

**He's a riveting jumble and an important reminder that brilliance and competence along one axis hardly ensures brilliance or even coherence along another.**

"Were the slaves really thinking about the American dream?" she asked. "No, because they were thinking, 'What the hell just happened?'" It's a thought I myself have had after listening to Carson.

Carson is the only African-American in Trump's Cabinet, and he's a great lesson — for the left as well as the right — that sensitivity is a function of sensibility, not merely of complexion or membership in a given identity group.

A black person can bumble into racially hurtful comments. A female executive can turn a blind eye to sexism in the ranks below her. A gay person can ignore or indulge

homophobia. Diversity increases the odds that an organization sees the world more acutely, accurately and empathetically. But it's not the end of the effort, and it's no guarantee.

Carson rose from hardship to acclaim and riches. He performed awe-inspiring surgeries. He also suggested that prison causes homosexuality, which he separately likened to bestiality, and that Planned Parenthood aimed, through abortions, to limit the black population. He compared Obamacare to slavery.

He's a riveting jumble and an important reminder that brilliance and competence along one axis hardly ensures brilliance or even coherence along another. Although we like to tag people as geniuses or fools — it's a stark, easy taxonomy — they're more complicated and compartmentalized than that.

Carson is enraptured by what people can be made to remember. I'm fascinated by what they choose to forget. Just before Trump nominated Carson to be housing secretary, one of Carson's principal campaign advisers said that the good doctor knew far too little about the federal government to work in it. Trump decided to pay that no heed.

During the campaign, Trump said that incidents of aggression in Carson's youth revealed a "pathological temper" and lumped him together with pedophiles, explaining: "You don't cure a child molester. There's no cure for it. Pathological — there's no cure for that."

But Carson shrugged that off when Trump came around with a glitzy job offer. It was all water under the hippocampus.

In his speech Monday, Carson said, "There is nothing in this universe that even begins to compare with the human brain and what it is capable of." He got that much right, and how.

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