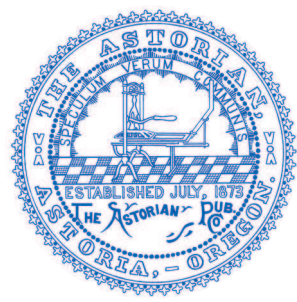


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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OUR VIEW

Congress should reinvest in our national parks

Bipartisan legislation was introduced in the U.S. Senate in March to start catching up with a shameful \$12 billion deferred-maintenance backlog in our national parks — the National Park Service Legacy Act, co-sponsored by Sens. Mark Warner, D-Virginia, and Rob Portman, R-Ohio. We all should take time to encourage federal lawmakers and the president to support this long overdue reinvestment in these assets of premier national importance.

Locally, Lewis and Clark National Historical Park has nearly \$1.5 million in overdue work to restore and maintain a bistate complex of facilities key to understanding America's westward expansion and the ancient civilizations disrupted by our arrival. A result of intense involvement by local residents, helped by the Oregon and Washington state congressional delegations in the years surrounding the 2005-06 expedition bicentennial, Lewis and Clark should not have to languish until the tricentennial before again receiving the in-depth attention it needs.

Elsewhere in Oregon, Crater Lake National Park currently requires \$84 million to catch up with the 21st century. The John Day Fossil Beds National Monument needs \$1.6 million. Nez Perce National Historical Park has the smallest to-do list, a not-inconsiderable \$133,000. Washington state, with substantially more national park assets than Oregon, has more than \$500 million in work that ought to have been part of routine federal budgeting.

Like neglected dogs

This must become a top national priority. We simply aren't fulfilling our responsibility to future generations when we treat these assets like neglected dogs to be chained outside and forgotten. As we observed years ago, weeds and duct-tape may be more truthful symbols of our nation's parks than shaggy bears and wild ducks.

There's plenty of blame to go around — not least the good intentions that lead Congress to designate new parks, but without forming a tangible plan for keeping them up. Our still-growing nation needs to set aside recreational and heritage lands for future generations, but it's irresponsible to keep adding to parks if we're unwilling to pay for upkeep.

This has been a matter of local concern for decades. In February 2007, when the maintenance backlog stood at \$5 billion, we favorably commented on President George W. Bush's Centennial Initiative to resolve the problem before the 100th birthday of the National Park Service in 2016. Aiming to raise \$2 billion via private donations and matching federal funds, it ended up generating less than 1/20th that sum. It was wishful thinking. Funding essential park functions with donations was "an illusion," a congressman commented at the time. "Our national parks are national treasures — and their funding is a national responsibility," he said.

Fantasy of private funds

So what's different about the new Senate legislation? It doesn't rely on the fantasy of private funds for parks, but does encourage private-public collaborations. Private firms might, for example, be tasked with staffing park entry booths, freeing rangers to care for parklands and help visitors enjoy them.

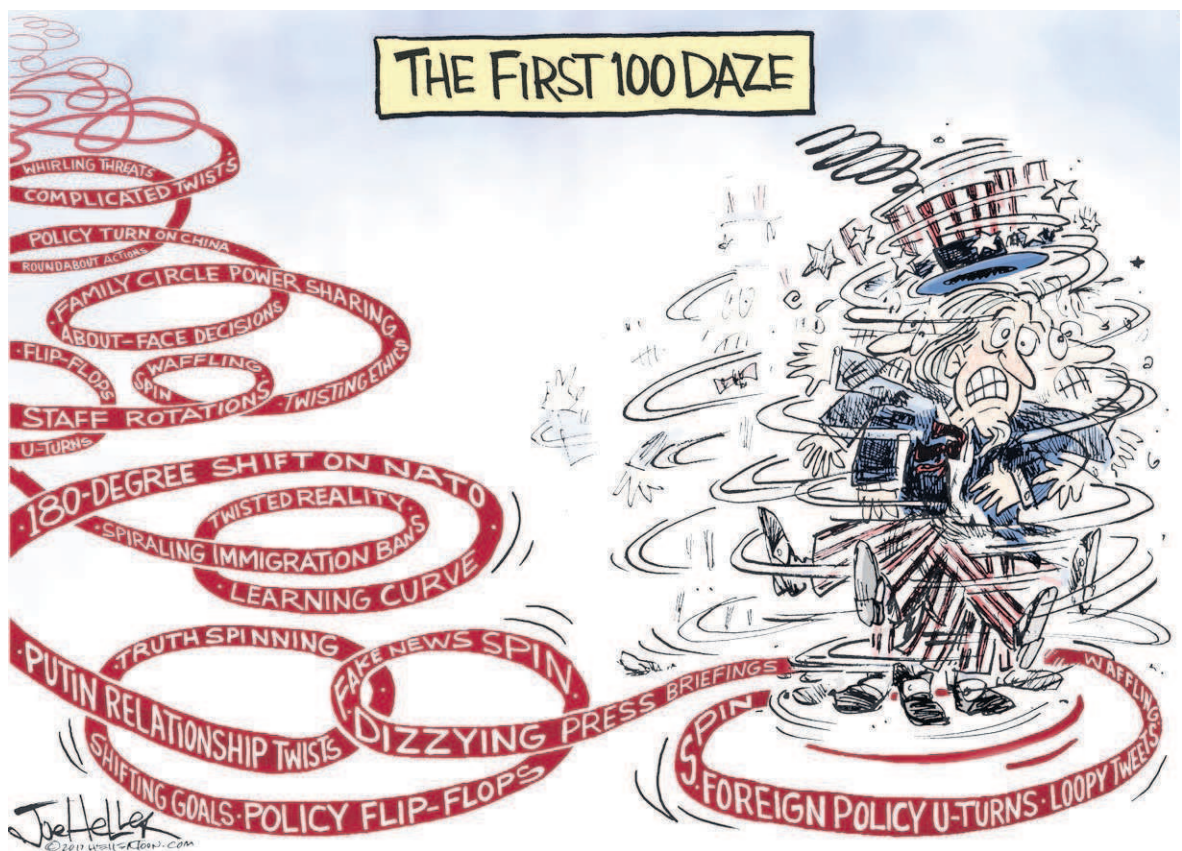
It sets up an earmarked account, appropriately funded with revenues from oil, gas, coal and mineral extraction from federal lands. Eighty percent would go to repairs and rehabilitation. Twenty percent would pay for park roads, bridges and tunnels. Discretionary spending and land acquisition would not get any of this money.

President Donald Trump and new Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke, formerly a Montana congressman, are fans of national parks. This week, Zinke noted a record 331 million visits were made to park facilities in 2016, producing \$34.9 billion for the U.S. economy — \$2.9 billion more than in 2015. National parks supported 318,000 U.S. jobs last year, he said.

"In the coming years, we will look at ways to make innovative investments in our parks to enhance visitor experiences and improve our aging infrastructure," Zinke said.

But we don't need to wait for "coming years." The National Park Service Legacy Act is the tool we need today, a way to support many more jobs through reconstruction of obsolete park highways, bridges and other aging infrastructure like sewer and water systems. "These would be American jobs. American jobs to help restore our parks and help local communities — it's hard to beat that," according to the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Not everything needs to result in conflict. If we can't all enthusiastically support national parks, just what can we support? Let's get behind this initiative for the sake of our children and grandchildren.



One hundred days of horror

By CHARLES BLOW
New York Times News Service

With Donald Trump's 100th day in office fast approaching, White House staffers are reportedly trying desperately to "rebrand" the colossal failure of the first 100 days as some kind of success.

Trump's legislative agenda has been stymied. The drip, drip, drip of negative news about connections between campaign associates and Russia — and Russia's efforts to affect our election — continues unabated. He seems to have no real strategy for governance other than pouting and gloating. His advisers are at each other's throats. And the public has soured on him to a historic degree.

His failures so far, I suppose, should bring resisters like me some modicum of joy, but I must confess that they don't. Or, more precisely, if they do, that joy is outweighed by the rolling litany of daily horrors that Trump has inflicted.

The horrors are both consuming and exhausting. For me at this point they center on an erosion of equality. This by no means downplays Trump's incessant lying, the outrage of him draining the Treasury for his personal junkets, or his disturbing turn toward war. But somewhat below the radar, or at least with less fanfare, our access, inclusion and justice are being assailed by a man who lied on the campaign trail promising to promote them.

As a candidate, Trump blasted Jeb Bush, who while answering a question about defunding Planned Parenthood suggested that the federal government had overfunded women's health care.

On MSNBC's "Morning Joe," Trump prattled to Mika Brzezinski: "The women's health issue, which Jeb Bush so amazingly blew about four or five days ago when he said 'no money going to women's health issues' or essentially that. With me, Mika, I would be the best for women, the best for women's health issues."

Well, last week that very same man quietly signed legislation "aimed at cutting off federal funding to Planned Parenthood and other groups that perform abortions," according to the New York Times. As The Times explained, the bill would allow state and local governments to withhold "federal funding for family planning services related to contraception, sexually transmitted infections, fertility, pregnancy care, and breast and cervical cancer screening from qualified health providers — regardless of whether they also performed abortions."

As a candidate, Trump claimed to be a better friend to the LGBT



AP Photo/Evan Vucci
 President Donald Trump waves as he walks with first lady Melania Trump during the inauguration parade on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., in January.

community than Hillary Clinton, tweeting of that community "I will fight for you," and saying during an interview on NBC's "Today" show that transgender people should "use the bathroom that they feel is appropriate."

He seems to have no real strategy for governance other than pouting and gloating.

As president, his administration rescinded Obama-era protections for transgender students in public schools that allowed them to use bathrooms that correspond with their gender identity.

As a candidate, Trump disparagingly chided black voters with the question, "What the hell do you have to lose?" and issued a "New Deal for Black America" in which he promised: "We will apply the law fairly, equally and without prejudice. There will be only one set of rules — not a two-tiered system of justice."

As president, his Justice Department has dropped its objection to a racially discriminatory Texas voter ID law. Just last week Time reported: "A judge ruled for a second time Monday that Texas' strict voter ID law was intentionally crafted to discriminate against minorities, which follows another court finding evidence of racial

gerrymandering in how Republican lawmakers drew the state's election maps."

This Justice Department has also "rescinded a 6-month-old Obama administration directive that sought to curtail the government's use of private prisons," as reported by NBC News, and "ordered a sweeping review of federal agreements with dozens of law enforcement agencies, an examination that reflects President Trump's emphasis on law and order and could lead to a retreat on consent decrees with troubled police departments nationwide," as The Times reported.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said Thursday that consent decrees "can reduce morale of the police officers."

Furthermore, the Washington Post reported last week that Sessions had appointed Steven H. Cook to be one of his top lieutenants, noting: "Law enforcement officials say that Sessions and Cook are preparing a plan to prosecute more drug and gun cases and pursue mandatory minimum sentences. The two men are eager to bring back the national crime strategy of the 1980s and '90s from the peak of the drug war, an approach that had fallen out of favor in recent years as minority communities grappled with the effects of mass incarceration."

The clock is being turned back. Vulnerable populations are under relentless attack by this administration. This is a war, and that is not hyperbole or exaggeration. While folks are hoping that some Russia-related revelation will emerge from the darkness to bring this administration to a calamitous conclusion, the administration is busy rebuilding and reinforcing the architecture of oppression in plain sight.

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Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian. We do not publish open letters or third-party letters.

Letters should be fewer than 350 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone numbers. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy and verbal verification of authorship. Only two letters per writer are printed each month.

Letters written in response to

other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner. Letters referring to news stories should also mention the headline and date of publication.

The Daily Astorian welcomes short "in gratitude" notes from readers for publication. They should keep to a 200-word maximum and writers are asked to avoid simply listing event sponsors. They

must be signed, include the writer's address, phone number and are subject to condensation and editing for style, grammar, etc.

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Or by mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103