

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW

Listen to the lessons Native American tribes have to tell

The Chinook Indian Nation's First Salmon ceremony last month at Chinook Point in Fort Columbia State Park in Washington state was a fresh reminder of how much all our lives can be enriched by a greater consciousness of Native American heritage at the mouth of the Columbia River.

The event was attended by representatives from a number of other tribes, including the Shoalwater Bay Tribe, who occupy the only reservation now extant in the Columbia River estuary counties. It is both newsworthy and symbolic that their small homeland at the northwestern tip of Willapa Bay is under threat of gradual destruction by the ocean: All native traditions in our vicinity are at risk, in one way or another.

The First Salmon event was overwhelmingly positive, however. As in many past years, a Chinook cedar canoe was paddled into sight of the spectacular coves at the point, evoking centuries-old beliefs and customs. Famously at home on the water, except for their modern jackets, the paddlers could have been from a century ago or 10 centuries ago. Tribal members and guests waiting on the shore were visibly moved by the arrival of a bright Chinook salmon representing countless others that sustained local people back into the depths of time.

Chinook Chairman Tony Johnson spoke of the original names of places and of customs like having tribal children place ripe salmon berries in the mouth of the First Salmon by way of acknowledgment of its sacrifice. Salmon harvests once were governed by many taboos, violation of which would result in the salmon spurning efforts to catch them. Along with upriver dams and other handicaps, we can perhaps imagine it was the violation of such standards of care that led to sadly diminished salmon runs of today.

There are interesting efforts underway to rebuild Chinook resilience and sense of self. One woman was honored for teaching others how to weave Pacific Northwest tribal hats from strips of cedar fiber, while another spoke of successful collaboration with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife in getting wild fish and game meat to people in need. Later this year, Chinooks will participate in Tribal Journeys 2017, a voyage in open canoes to Vancouver Island. All these things are good to hear about.

Johnson spoke of a renewed effort to gain formal federal legal status, a step that could bring better health care and other opportunities for tribal members and their non-native neighbors.

Intelligent work needed against invasive species

Two Daily Astorian stories last week illustrated sharply contrasting attitudes to plants we struggle to eradicate and others we endeavor to nurture. In certain respects, such struggles harken back to our earliest days as hunter-gatherers, while in other ways we are entering a new era in which humans have to actively manage our environment.

Policeman's helmet, an ornamental garden plant from the Himalayas in Asia that discovered a desirable habitat in our local outdoors, is the target of weeding by the North Coast Land Conservancy and the Necanicum Watershed Council. It joins Japanese knotweed, Scotch broom and other invasive plants that are combated with varying levels of intensity in the lush wetlands, riparian areas and forests of the Lower Columbia region. By all indications, policeman's helmet is far from the worst of the vegetative freeloaders, but keeping ahead of it may avoid more serious problems in the future.

If you examine photos of our area from around 1900 and earlier, it becomes obvious that early settlers made many decisions — or accidents — that transformed our outdoors from what it was when Lewis and Clark visited. European beach grass now covers once free-flowing sand dunes. Evergreen and Himalayan blackberries thickly shroud hillsides where lush ferns once grew. If we were to subtract out of our environment all the plants we've introduced, we might only barely recognize the place.

On the other hand, native violets have been crowded out by human-introduced grasses and weeds, putting Oregon silver-spot butterflies at risk. In their caterpillar stage, they depend on the violets for food. In some areas, violets are being reestablished, while in others — such as Saddle Mountain — they still naturally thrive, but the butterflies seem not to have found them. Biologists are now transplanting caterpillars back into these latter areas.

As more humans occupy the planet and the climate changes, intelligent hard work will be needed to fight invasive species and help native ones. We all can play a role by being careful what we plant and supporting measures like butterfly reintroduction. Maintaining a rich, interesting and healthy mix of plants and animals is increasingly up to us.



GUEST COLUMN

In the GOP health care bill, Oregon's kids lose



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Children could lose health care coverage under a Republican proposal to repeal and replace Obamacare.

By **JEFF MERKLEY**
and **TONIA HUNT**

Special to *The Daily Astorian*

We've been hearing a lot about winners and losers these days. Yet, even as our kids on the baseball or soccer fields may be winning trophies, they are in imminent danger of losing something much more important.

Children in Oregon and across the country risk losing health care coverage through Medicaid, and all of the benefits that accompany it, due to the U.S. Senate's Better Care Reconciliation Act.

The act provides tens of thousands of dollars in tax breaks to the top 1 percent richest Americans, actually raising their incomes by 2 percent. It cuts financial aid that families need to obtain coverage. It cuts the average federal contribution over the next seven years to 57 percent of the actual cost of Medicaid, leaving states to pick up the tab or cut eligibility and coverage. It allows radical cuts to which health services can be covered. In short, these drastic cuts to Medicaid and health services, huge financial benefits to the wealthy, and cost-shifts to states, will result in millions of Americans — millions of children — losing coverage.

Here are five ways children could lose:

First, attacking Medicaid expansion puts at risk health coverage for the more than 30 million children across the country who depend on it; children account for 43 percent of all Medicaid enrollees. In Oregon, over 400,000 children receive their health care coverage through Medicaid and "CHIP," the Children's Health Insurance Program. Gains made since 2008 in children's health care coverage will be lost even though expanded eligibility and coverage has led to more children receiving the health care they so desperately need.

Second, rural children will be disproportionately affected by cuts to Medicaid because poverty rates are higher in rural Oregon. The agriculture and small business jobs in these communities are less likely to offer insurance through employment. In fact, more than 9,000 children in Eastern Oregon's 2nd Congressional District rely on Medicaid and CHIP for their coverage, which protects their families from financial risk. Children in both urban and rural areas thrive when they have primary and preventive care. Third, children with pre-existing conditions will suffer. Although companies can't charge sick children more for their coverage, they can cut which health conditions they choose to cover. There will be no guarantee of mental health, dental, drug and addiction services, or even maternity care. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that maternity and mental health coverage will be dropped from many policies in many states, making them much more expensive for those who need them. The lack of accessibil-

ity of these services would disproportionately harm those least able to afford them.

Fourth, kids with severe disabilities will have fewer choices and less access to care when Medicaid is capped. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, nearly half of all children with special health needs receive health insurance through Medicaid, CHIP, or public coverage. Low-income families with disabled children rely on early screening, diagnosis, and treatment. The act slashes funding to pediatricians and children's hospitals providing those services.

Fifth, caps to Medicaid are a calamitous cost-shift to Oregon, which is already financially over-burdened. Make no mistake: caps are cuts. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the "caps" amount to \$772 billion in cuts. The act passes the buck to states and risks damaging kids — now and into the future. Over 50 years of data prove that kids with Medicaid coverage have better health, fewer adolescent deaths, lower high school dropout rates, higher college graduation rates, and greater wealth and income. Eviscerating Medicaid will never bring Oregon the results children deserve.

Don't be fooled by the promises of legislators who want a "win" with this plan. In the end, when Senate Republicans cap Medicaid and end essential benefits, and leave the most vulnerable Americans to pick up the tab, Oregon's kids lose.

Jeff Merkley, a Democrat, is the junior U.S. senator for Oregon. Tonia Hunt is the executive director of Children First for Oregon.

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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

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