

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Quality trails benefit residents and tourists alike

Trails and footpaths are among our region's best underappreciated assets, as explored in our story last week about the Oregon Coast Trail. We ought to be doing more to improve, use and publicize them.

This year, more walkers are discovering the Oregon Coast Trail because of lingering snow pack and high water in the Sierra Nevada mountains of Northern California, making the more-famous Pacific Crest Trail harder to use. The mountain trail has gained visibility in recent years thanks to Cheryl Strayed's memoir "Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail" and the subsequent Reese Witherspoon movie based on it.

It's safe to say that most long-distance trails are not huge economic boons for nearby communities — most hikers don't drop lots of money at art galleries or hotels. But they frequently do buy supplies and sometimes replacement gear in the communities they pass through, while requiring little public outlay for facilities and services.

The Oregon Coast Trail is in some ways more of a concept than reality. It is officially designated but lacks the dedicated infrastructure and camping sites provided on better-established routes like the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. Although coastal hikers are respectful of their surroundings and tell of warm hospitality along the way, they also have to worry about finding legal campgrounds as the trail winds past Oregon's many coastal towns.

In addition to the urban trails of Astoria and Warrenton that we've recently noted in this space, the website Atlas Obscura celebrates Astoria's many obscure footpaths, which it calls Goonie Trails. (See [www.atlasobscura.com/places/goonie-trails](http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/goonie-trails).) Elsewhere in our region, Pacific County Economic Development Director Jim Sayce recently undertook an epic bike ride on the Willapa Hills Trail. Only partly developed, it follows an old railroad right-of-way through spectacular but seriously rough terrain.

There is something to be gained from residents and government entities cooperating to improve the usability and awareness of all these trails. In much of Europe, there is a well-established tradition of manageable walks between lodging places and eateries, allowing hikers to carry lighter loads. They enjoy the landscape, while communities earn money. It is possible to imagine development of similar networks here.

Trails are inexpensive infrastructure that benefit residents and tourists alike. We should realize what great assets they are and begin acting accordingly.

# A new era of productivity possible at Port of Astoria

For the Port of Astoria, last week marked what might be the beginning of a new era, one where "boring but productive" becomes the norm over what has been a time of distraction and inflammatory innuendo.

We hope that's the case. It's been a long time coming.

The five-member commission saw new members Frank Spence and Dirk Rohne sworn in on July 3, along with returning Commissioner James Campbell.

They join Commissioners Robert Mushen and Bill Hunsinger. In the May election, Campbell soundly defeated fellow Commissioner Stephen Fulton, who chose to run against Campbell rather than to try and retain his own seat. Rohne and Spence easily out-talied candidates who had platforms similar to Fulton's. Fulton and Hunsinger were highly critical of Port Executive Director Jim Knight and were often on the losing ends of contentious 3-2 votes.

The new commissioners each pledged in their campaigning to move the Port ahead, away from past distractions, with Rohne coining the "boring but productive" description of how he'd like to see the commission operate.

The commission's first act of business was to appoint new officers, with Spence, a retired former city and county administrator, becoming president, and Rohne, a Brownsmead dairy farmer and former elected county and community college representative, taking the vice president appointment.

Now that the new commission and leadership are in place, it's time to get down to business without the past problems. Issues of economic development, Tongue Point's future, the airport and Port infrastructure each await action.

It's time for the new era of stability and productivity to begin.

**It's time for the new era of stability and productivity to begin.**



# A conspiracy of dunces



AP Photo/Susan Walsh

People gather outside the White House on Tuesday to protest President Donald Trump.

By ROSS DOUTHAT  
New York Times News Service

Here is a good rule of thumb for dealing with Donald Trump: Everyone who gives him the benefit of the doubt eventually regrets it.



This was true of clients and contractors and creditors throughout his business career. It was true of the sycophants and opportunists before whom he dangled Cabinet appointments during the campaign and then, oh, never mind. It has been true of his Cabinet members and spokesmen, whose attempts to defend and explain their boss' conduct are gleefully undercut by the boss himself. And it should be true — for the sake of their souls, I sincerely hope it's true — of the Republican leaders whose reputations for probity and principle he has stomped all over since winning their party's nomination.

And now it's true of me.

The benefit of the doubt I extended to Trump was limited, but on a rather important subject: I thought that direct collusion between his inner circle and Russian officialdom during the 2016 campaign was relatively unlikely and the odds of ever finding proof of such a conspiracy vanishingly low. A lot of weirdness around Trump and Russia, I argued, had a more normal explanation — he had made business deals with Russians, he still harbors a 1980s-era vision of superpower cooperation, and as a foreign-policy neophyte he clutched the idea of détente like a security blanket even as the Russians separately made moves to help him win.

My argument is no longer operative, because we know now that Donald Trump's son, his son-in-law and his campaign manager all took a meeting in which it was explicitly promised that damaging information on Hillary Clinton would be supplied as "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."

The meeting's existence does not carry us all the way to the maximal collusion scenario, in which Trump himself was aware of Russia's role in the hack of the Democratic National Committee and ordered his aides to conspire with WikiLeaks and Russian intelligence to time the drip-drip-drip of hacked emails and maximize their impact.

As the hapless Don Jr. — the Gob Bluth or Fredo Corleone of

a family conspicuously short on Michaels — protested in his own defense, the Russian rendezvous we know about came before (though only slightly before) the WikiLeaks haul was announced. So the Trump team presumably assumed that it involved some other Hillary-related dirt — some of the missing Clinton server emails that Trump himself jokingly ("jokingly"?) urged Russian hackers to conjure and release, or direct evidence of Clinton Foundation corruption in its Russian relationships.

With that semi-exculpatory explanation in hand, you can grope your way to the current anti-anti-Trump talking point — that Don Jr. and company were just hoping to "gather oppo" to which a foreign government might happen to be privy, much as Democratic operatives looked to Ukraine for evidence of the Trump campaign's shady ties.

**Everyone who gives him the benefit of the doubt eventually regrets it.**

But even if accepting oppo from a foreign government is technically legal — it probably is, but I leave that question to campaign finance lawyers to work out — this talking point takes you only so far. I am not a particularly fierce Russia hawk, but the Russians are still a more-hostile-than-not power these days, with stronger incentives to subvert American democracy than the average foreign government. So taking their oppo has a gravity that should have stopped a more upright and patriotic campaign short.

Second, if the Russians had been dangling some of Hillary's missing 30,000 emails, those, too, would have been hacked — that is, stolen — to end up in Moscow's hands. So Don Jr., Paul Manafort and Jared Kushner should have known going in that if the offer was genuine, the oppo useful, it might involve stolen goods.

But on the basis of the emails, the younger Trump went in not skeptically but eagerly ("if it's what you say I love it"), ignoring or simply accepting the weird formulation about Russian support for Trump's campaign. And then of course every-

body lied about or "forgot" about the meeting, repeatedly and consistently, right up until the emails themselves made their way to the press.

So while this is not direct evidence that the president of the United States was complicit in a virtual burglary perpetrated against the other party during an election season, it's strong evidence that we should drop the presumption that such collusion is an extreme or implausible scenario.

Instead, the mix of inexperience, incaution and conspiratorial glee on display in the emails suggests that people in Trump's immediate family — not just satellites like Roger Stone — would have been delighted to collude if the opportunity presented itself. Indeed, if the Russians didn't approach the Trump circle about how to handle the DNC email trove, it was probably because they recognized that anyone this naive, giddy and "Burn After Reading"-level stupid would make a rather poor espionage partner.

Then keep in mind, too, that all of this has come out (relatively) easily, thanks to digging by this newspaper's reporters and leaks from the various factions in and around the White House, without the subpoenas and immunity deals that the formal investigations have at their disposal. That means there is probably more and worse to come, and the more there is, the worse the president's dealings with James Comey look. Even if the president himself is innocent of Russian collusion, protecting your family from exposure is a pretty strong motive for obstruction.

In the end, impeachment is political, not legal, and House Republicans probably won't impeach for anything short of a transcript of a call between Trump and Putin in which the words "yes, I want you to hack their servers big-league, Vladimir" appear in black-and-white. And even then ...

But right now, the 2018 congressional elections promise to be a de facto referendum on impeachment. There are enough sparks in the smoke; there will probably be fire for some of Trump's intimates before another year is out.

And as for the president himself — well, to conclude where I began, anyone presuming his innocence at this point should have all the confidence of Chris Christie awaiting his Cabinet appointment, or Sean Spicer reading over the day's talking points. Keep an eye on that Trump-monogrammed rug under your feet; it may not be there for long.