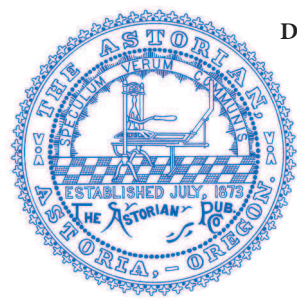


# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## OUR VIEW

### Solid cooperation led to important legislation

While Republican U.S. senators and representatives returned home forlorn last week for the long August congressional recess after failure to repeal or replace Obamacare, our region's congressional delegation chalked up a big bipartisan win for fishermen. And despite a pervading air of dysfunction in Congress, there is solid cooperation between the parties in support of several other important legislative proposals aimed at issues, ranging from improving rural cellphone service to curing the widespread national shortage of affordable housing.

#### Tri-state

Lower Columbia River communities are thankful for bipartisan work led by U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Washington, to make the tri-state agreement a permanent fixture of West Coast fisheries management. U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, Patty Murray, D-Washington, Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, and Dianne Feinstein, D-California, co-sponsored the bill. U.S. Reps. Jamie Herrera-Beutler, R-Washington, and Derek Kilmer, D-Washington, carried the legislation in the House.

The tri-state agreement is one of the most important West Coast fishery laws, but one that relatively few know about, even here where it underpins a crucial part of our economy. Working together since 1998 under auspices of federal law, the crabbers and managers of Oregon, Washington state and California have created a "sustainable, science-based fishery management program that keeps fishermen fishing and crab stocks thriving," in the words of Cantwell's office. This isn't mere political puffery — in an industry that has little use for regulators, the collaborative model gives knowledgeable crabbers a direct role in ensuring the future of the crab resource and the thousands of rural jobs tied to it.

Making the agreement permanent will remove a lingering doubt about the federal government's commitment to locally based governance of crab harvests and conservation. It will permit a more concentrated focus on the many other issues facing the fishery — everything from the acidifying ocean to competition with other industries for offshore areas.

#### Outdoor recreation

In late July, Wyden cosponsored with a Republican colleague federal legislation aimed at cutting red tape that impedes public use of recreational lands. As reported by Oregon Public Broadcasting, Wyden's initiative envisions a number of common sense — and probably popular — steps like requiring agencies to sell passes and permits online, and work with states to create passes that cover both state and federal recreation areas.

Though mostly directed at the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would be required to include recreational activities in its planning. In our region, Army Corps assets like jetties already play an important but largely unacknowledged role in recreation.

Especially elsewhere in the Pacific Northwest, where logging restrictions have decimated economies, making outdoor recreation easier is a laudable goal.

#### Rural Wireless Act

Yet another bipartisan congressional act was endorsed last month by Wyden and others. It would help build out cell service and wireless internet coverage throughout rural Oregon and other states.

The Rural Wireless Act of 2017 recognized that cell service is essential 21st century infrastructure that is necessary for safety and economic development.

"Wireless coverage is essential for law enforcement and health care providers to respond quickly to life-and-death situations and for precision agriculture as well as small mom-and-pop businesses to communicate with their customers in the global economy," Wyden said in a press release. "Simply put, the reliability of wireless coverage data maps must be improved for the safety and well-being of rural Oregonians."

We all should join in supporting this sensible legislation. It's encouraging to see the parties working together on it.

#### Affordable housing

Cantwell is leading legislation, the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act, to expand the successful Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and make important fixes to the program.

A shortage of supply and rising demand are pushing rents beyond affordable levels for many Americans, including here around the mouth of the Columbia River.

Under Cantwell's proposal, cosponsored by Finance Committee Chairman Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, ranking member Wyden and 16 others, the expanded tax credit would help create or preserve about 1.3 million affordable homes over a 10-year period — an increase of 400,000 more units than is possible under the current program. According to the National Association of Home Builders, the Cantwell-Hatch proposal would create an additional 452,000 jobs over the next 10 years supporting the construction of additional units.

All these initiatives show how much might be achieved when the parties in Congress work together whenever they can. Repairing Obamacare in mutually agreeable ways should be among their highest priorities.



## Obamacare rage in retrospect

By PAUL KRUGMAN

New York Times News Service

I guess it ain't over until the portly golfer sings, but it does look as if Obamacare will



survive. In the end, Mitch McConnell couldn't find the votes he needed; many thanks are due to U.S. Sens. Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski and John McCain (who turns out to be a better man than I thought), not to mention the solid wall of Democrats standing up for what's right. Meanwhile, all indications are that the insurance markets are stabilizing, with insurer profitability up and only around 0.1 percent of enrollees unserved.

It's true that the tweeter-in-chief retains considerable ability to sabotage care, but Republicans are basically begging him to stop, believing — correctly — that the public will blame them for any future deterioration in coverage.

Why did Obamacare survive? The shocking answer: It's still here because it does so much good. Tens of millions have health coverage — imperfect, but far better than none at all — thanks to the Affordable Care Act. Millions more rest easier knowing that coverage will still be available if something goes wrong — if, for example, they lose their employer-sponsored plan or develop a chronic condition.

Which raises a big question: Why did the prospect of health reform produce so much popular rage in 2009 and 2010?

I'm not talking about the rage of Republican apparatchiks, who hated and feared the ACA, not because they thought it would fail, but because they were afraid it would work. (It has.) Nor am I talking about the rage of some wealthy people furious that their taxes were going up to pay for lesser mortals' care.

No, I'm talking about the people who screamed at their congressional representatives in town halls. People like, for example, the man who pushed his wheelchair-bound son, who was suffering from cerebral palsy, in front of a congressman, yelling that President Barack Obama's health care plan would provide the boy with "no care whatsoever" and would be a "death sentence."

The reality, of course, is that people with pre-existing medical conditions are among the ACA's biggest beneficiaries, and would have had the most to lose if conservative Republicans had managed to repeal the law. And this should have been obvious from the beginning.

Beyond that, it's now clear (as should also have been clear from the beginning) that very few people



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite

U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, is surrounded by reporters as she arrives on Capitol Hill in July before a test vote on the Republican health care bill. Collins was one of three Republican senators to vote against the GOP health bill.

other than wealthy taxpayers were hurt by health reform, which was designed to disrupt existing health arrangements as little as possible.

Yes, around 2.6 million people who had individual policies with high deductibles and/or limited coverage were told that their policies were too skimpy to meet ACA requirements. But they were offered the chance to buy better policies, and many of them probably received subsidies that made these better policies cheaper than their original coverage. Meanwhile, some young, healthy, affluent people saw their premiums rise. But predictions of mass harm were completely wrong.

**Whenever I see someone castigating liberals for engaging in identity politics, I wonder what such people imagine the right has been doing all these years.**

Or if you regard statistical evidence as "fake news," consider what happens every time Republicans call on the public to come forward with horror stories about how they've been hurt by Obamacare: The result keeps being an outpouring of support for the law, bolstered by tales of lives and finances saved

by the ACA.

So once again: What was Obamacare rage about?

Much of it was orchestrated by pressure groups like Freedom Works, and it's a good guess that some of the "ordinary citizens" who appeared at town halls were actually right-wing activists. Still, there was plenty of genuine popular rage, stoked by misinformation and outright lies from the usual suspects: Fox News, talk radio and so on. For example, around 40 percent of the public believed that Obamacare would create "death panels" depriving senior citizens of care.

The question then becomes why so many people believed these lies. The answer, I believe, comes down to a combination of identity politics and affinity fraud.

Whenever I see someone castigating liberals for engaging in identity politics, I wonder what such people imagine the right has been doing all these years. For generations, conservatives have conditioned many Americans to believe that safety-net programs are all about taking things away from white people and giving stuff to minorities.

And those who stoked Obamacare rage were believed because they seemed to some Americans like their kind of people — that is, white people defending them against you-know-who.

So what's the moral of this story? There's bad news and good news.

It's certainly not encouraging to realize how easily many Americans were duped by right-wing lies, pushed into screaming rage against a reform that would actually improve their lives.

On the other hand, the truth did eventually prevail, and Republicans' inability to handle that truth is turning into a real political liability. And in the meantime, Obamacare has made America a better place.

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