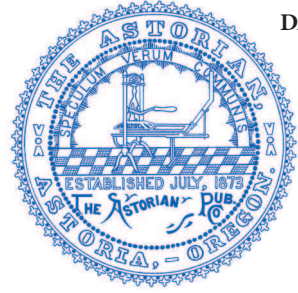


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OUR VIEW

Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Areas near the Astoria Riverwalk and the Astoria Transit Center are popular with the homeless during the summer months.

We need to keep our focus on the homeless

Homelessness takes many forms and Clatsop County has them all — folks sleeping rough in the outdoors, others basing their lives out of motor vehicles, and many more who must rely on the kindness of family and friends for precarious temporary places to alight.

Our story last Thursday about the problem was shocking. While our county is 19th out of 36 in total population, we are fifth in the number of homeless people. Social service providers and advocates believe Clatsop's official estimate of 682 homeless is an underestimate and that the actual figure is more like 1,000 or more.

Differing estimates can be explained by factors like the inherent difficulty of counting people with no fixed abode, and by alternative definitions of "homeless." There can be no doubt, however, that our county has a bigger problem than most.

No one with a secure home would find it acceptable to be without one. On Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs, shelter is one of foundational elements at the base of the pyramid. Without dependable shelter, there is little hope of being safe, maintaining meaningful social bonds, feeling self-esteem or reaching our full potential as human beings. Every day is a struggle when a person doesn't know where he or she will be spending the night.

Even as the state's population swells at one of the fastest rates in the nation, Oregon Housing and Community Services reports, "Tens of thousands of people are simply unable to afford these rising housing costs and have had to sleep in shelters, in their cars, or on the street."

We are comparatively fortunate in having Clatsop Community Action, Seaside's Helping Hands, active and engaged churches, and others reaching out to alleviate suffering and help people find permanent housing solutions. There are communities — and entire nations — that lack such helpers. But the problem is worsening and our social-support machinery sometimes seems on verge of bursting at the seams. There is a clear need for better understanding of root causes, with early intervention to help the homeless help themselves.

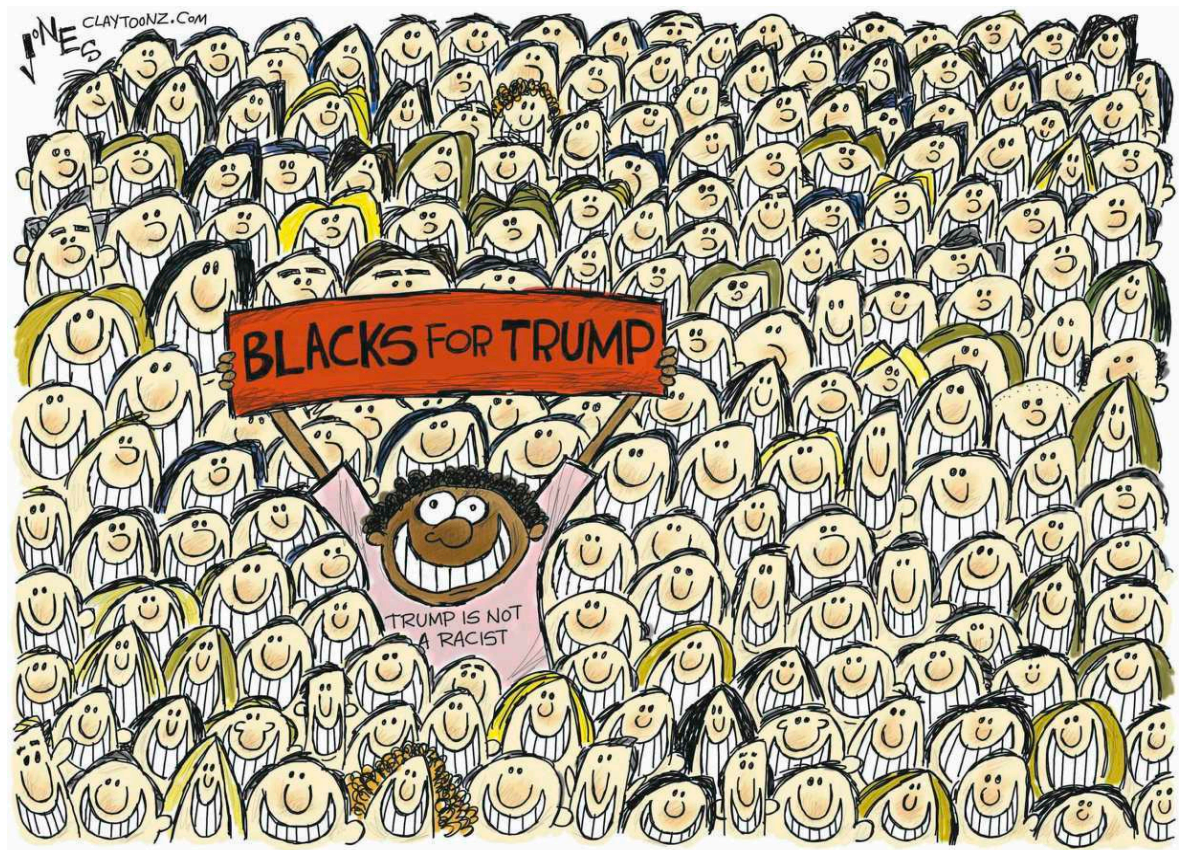
Some homeless are local people fallen on hard times, while others find themselves here after having been squeezed out of Portland and other urban centers. Some may gravitate here for the same reasons others choose to live on the North Coast — it is a beautiful, friendly area with great connections to the ocean and other attractions. But as our story reported, lack of housing, higher rents, decreasing median incomes and a population boom across the state are contributing to Oregon's increase in homelessness. Our state and nation continue to do a poor job making certain the mentally ill have decent housing. Clatsop County is a microcosm of all these challenges.

Dealing with many of these issues is beyond the capacity of cash-strapped counties and cities. However, with cooperation from the state and federal governments, housing needs are susceptible to some additional fixes: Tax credits and other tools can jump start multifamily housing construction, for example. The state can streamline permitting in ways that encourage affordable single-family housing.

As with so many other problems in our country, local homelessness will not be solved in a year or a decade. On a grand scale, it can be argued that better vocational training, a stronger safety net for those suffering addictions and brain diseases, and changes in approaches to urban planning eventually can make significant inroads in the problem.

For now, here on the coast we need to remain focused on individual cases and help in whatever modest ways we can.

The state can streamline permitting in ways that encourage affordable single-family housing.



AP Photo/David Goldman

Artist Douglas Orr paints a mural on a building in Aberdeen, Wash. Orr has been painting a block-long mural of a little girl blowing bubbles, each circle the scene of an imagined, hopeful future. Nearby hangs one of the baskets of pink petunias that decorate light posts all over town, watered regularly by residents trying to make their city feel alive again.

What if Bannon is right?

By TIMOTHY EGAN
New York Times News Service

In normal times, you could bank the bet that a man who was a Russian stooge, gave comfort to neo-Nazis and spent his first year in office trying to take health care from 22 million Americans was going to get destroyed when voters finally had a chance to send him a message.

Add to that an approval rating that hit 34 percent last week, and a poll from swing states showing 1 in 5 of people who voted for Donald Trump are now embarrassed by his presidency, and you'd think Democrats were in great shape for next year's midterm elections.

But consider Steve Bannon's parting political words, which were largely overlooked in the chaos of his exit. You heard the jokes — Trump finally found a racist monument he could get rid of, one of the better ones. But they obscure a dark doctrine from Bannon the Barbarian.

"The longer they talk about identity politics, I got 'em," he said of Democrats. "I want them to talk about racism every day. If the left is focused on race and identity, and we go with economic nationalism, we can crush the Democrats."

He may be right. More than anything else, the white voters who drifted from President Barack Obama in 2012 to Trump last year — a seemingly incongruent transition — sealed the Republican victory.

It turns out that racial resentment was the strongest predictor of whether a voter would flip from supporting a thoughtful, intelligent Democrat to a boorish, mentally unstable Republican. When you say Black Lives Matter, these white voters hear Kill a Cop. When you say diversity in the workplace, they hear special privileges for minorities at the expense of whites.

So, if you still wonder why Trump would give comfort to racists and Hitlerites, look at the reaction of his base this week. While the civilized world was appalled at his

remarks after the hate parade in Charlottesville, Virginia, a majority of Republicans approved of Trump's response. Approved.

It's too easy to write all these people off as racists, for that's exactly what Bannon is counting on. Yes, there's a genuine hate-cohort in the Republican Party — neo-Nazis, or "clowns and losers," in Bannon's terms — of about 10 percent, which is horrifyingly high.

Democrats could grab the economic nationalism argument from Bannon, refine it along Bernie Sanders lines, and run with it. Health care for all is pro-American.

But there are many more voters in Trump's camp who still consider themselves Democrats. Some live in the much-discussed zone of despair, places where opportunities for people without a college degree are few, and the opioid epidemic rages. These folks are persuadable, if the message is economic hope — something that Obama understood, and Hillary Clinton never did.

This doesn't mean that Democrats should not speak out when a cop kills someone for driving while black. Nor does it mean that Democrats should not join with progressive institutions — the military and forward-looking corporations among them — when Trump turns back the clock on transgender rights, or equal opportunity.

But you can't bang just one drum. Trump has said demonstrably

racist things many a time, from his birther obsession to his taco bowl tweet. He still won, "on a straight-forward platform of economic nationalism," as Bannon noted.

"As long as Democrats fail to understand this, they will continue to lose," he said.

So, even though Trump now threatens to shut down the government that he runs over his insane and unpopular border wall, even though he's told 1,000 verifiable lies since he's been in office, his horrid character will not be enough to help the forces of good.

Democrats need to flip 24 House seats to get a majority. History is certainly on their side. When Harry Truman was at his nadir in 1946, Democrats lost 45 seats in the House. George W. Bush, with an approval rating about the same as Trump's current standing, saw his party shed 30 seats and the majority in 2006.

I wouldn't trust that history. We're in a different universe — not end times, but truly awful times. Too many Americans have turned inward and dark. But they don't have to reside in that cave, if the Democrats can give them a reason to come out.

The history I would trust is with Franklin Roosevelt, who rallied broken Americans during the Great Depression to an agenda in which government could lift people up.

So far, Democrats have come up with a tepid slogan — a "better deal" — and a bushel of banalities. They need to go big, bold and simple, pounding home a single economic message: Trump is trying to make life worse for most Americans. Call him out for going after people's health care, for gutting protections for clean air and water, for killing studies on the health of miners in Appalachia.

Democrats could grab the economic nationalism argument from Bannon, refine it along Bernie Sanders lines, and run with it. Health care for all is pro-American. Raising wages across the country is pro-worker. A moonshot infrastructure program would lift every community. And then, Trump will do his part, ranting in the gutter where he feels most at home.