

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

DAVID F. PERO, Publisher & Editor

JIM VAN NOSTRAND, Managing Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN, Circulation Manager

DEBRA BLOOM, Business Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN, Production Manager

CARL EARL, Systems Manager

ESTABLISHED JULY 1873

THE ASTORIAN - PORTLAND, OREGON

OUR VIEW

# Hanford’s waste spread under a cloak of secrecy

Citadel of Secrets is one way of describing Washington, D.C. The dirty little secret about Washington’s secrets is that we all might be better off with fewer of them.

Writing Aug. 27 in The New York Times Magazine, Beverly Gage quotes the late U.S. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who believed that it is easier to keep secrets when you have fewer of them.

The biggest shroud of secrecy in the Pacific Northwest lies over the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. Because of its extraordinary moment of creation, during World War II, and its mission — to develop material for the unproven concept of an atomic bomb — Hanford’s very existence was a huge secret in the desert of southeast Washington state.

There is link between secrecy and the incompetence it hides. Of our government’s secrecy cult, Gage writes that, “This secrecy was a useful tool, but it became a crutch too — a way for federal employees to cover up mistakes or to inflate their own importance.”

As the dark side of nuclear secrecy, Exhibit A is Chernobyl, the Soviet nuclear power plant, which in 1986 had the most disastrous accident in history. The Chernobyl reactor was an old Russian design, without safety features and deep backup. Its accident created a large disaster zone. Months later, The New York Times Magazine published a devastating gallery of photos from that zone.

Like Chernobyl, Hanford’s N-Reactor lacked a backup, steel and concrete containment system. It was subsequently shut down.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, Hanford ceased manufacturing plutonium. That was also the point when Hanford’s veil of secrecy was lifted. Mark Heater of Hanford’s media relations office confirms that in February 1986, the Department of Energy released 19,000 pages of documents relating to Hanford.

In that decade, our region became aware that Hanford was a vast and leaking dump of hazardous nuclear waste. One of those underground waste plumes was headed toward the Columbia River.

It would be comforting to say that Hanford is a much more open secret these days. But Anna King cautions otherwise. As the Richland-based correspondent of the Northwest News Network, no journalist is consistently closer to Hanford than King. She says: “I don’t know if the shroud of secrecy has come off Hanford. Their whole mission is to not let out information.”

An astounding amount of money has been spent on cleaning up and containing Hanford’s poorly stored waste. It is the drawback of nuclear energy writ large. What does a nation do with the waste? Behind a wall of secrecy, the scientists and technicians who ran Hanford for decades gave us a disastrous answer to that question.

# Apprenticeships can help provide key skills

President Donald Trump can do no wrong in the eyes of his core supporters and no right for a majority of other Americans, so it’s noteworthy to see that his executive order expanding “industry-recognized” apprenticeships is meeting with approval across unusual political fault lines.

There is a risk doubling federal funding for apprenticeships to \$200 million will come at the expense of other job training programs — it would be shameful to see cuts to things like the Tongue Point Job Corps Center. But there is no question that apprenticeships are a key way of providing workers with the specific skills that employers want.

An Aug. 28 article by the Brookings Institution ([tinyurl.com/Brookings-Apprenticeships](http://tinyurl.com/Brookings-Apprenticeships)) reviews the good case that can be made for the president’s proposal. In essence, there needs to be stronger connections between what American students learn and what the job market has to offer. The U.S. lags far behind other global economies in supporting apprenticeships, with those we do offer heavily concentrated in the building trades.

Under the Trump administration’s plan, blueprints for apprentice programs will be designed by employers, unions, educators and others so that nationwide training is tailored to on-the-ground needs. Industry is assured that successful apprentices can get to work and be immediately productive.

“Barriers of ignorance, snobbery, and special interests stand in the way of expanded apprenticeships. But President Trump has created the opportunity for real progress in this area. Let’s see if it can be seized,” Brookings said.

This seems to be an initiative we all can root for.



# In defense of the truth

By CHARLES BLOW  
New York Times News Service

The U.S. Department of Justice confirmed in a Friday court filing what we all knew to be true: that Trump’s slanderous assertion on Twitter in March that President Barack Obama had Trump’s “‘wires tapped’ in Trump Tower” just before the election was in fact a total fabrication.

According to the filing, both the FBI and the Justice Department’s National Security Division “confirm that they have no records related to wiretaps as described by the March 4, 2017 tweets.”

To some this lying may seem small, just another defect among many, but to me it is so much more. Honesty is the foundation of character. The truth is the common base from which all else is built.

And yet, this man feels completely unbound by it. He has no respect or reverence for it. For him, honesty is an option, one that he feels no compunction to choose.

Before Trump’s bigotry, race-baiting, misogyny, corruption, bullying and vindictiveness, there is the lying. One could even argue that the lying is a core component of all the rest.

Of the statements by Trump that the fact-checking site PolitiFact has checked, just 5 percent were deemed absolutely true. Another 26 percent were just “mostly true” or “half true.” But a whopping 69 percent were found to be “mostly false,” “false” or “pants on fire,” the site’s worst rating.

Indeed, it seems that every major publication has taken a stab at trying to chronicle and explain Trump’s lying.

The Washington Post calculated that Trump made 492 false or misleading statements in his first 100 days — “That’s an average of 4.9 claims a day” — and that there were only 10 days without a single false claim. There were five days with 20 or more false claims.

But Politico may have been the most insightful. In an article there, Maria Konnikova pointed out in February that all presidents lie — all people lie — “but Donald Trump is in a different category.” She continued:

“The sheer frequency, spontaneity and seeming irrelevance of his lies have no precedent. Nixon, Reagan and Clinton were protecting their reputations; Trump seems to lie for the pure joy of it.”

Citing the work of Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert, Konnikova gave this glib assessment of how the brain deals with all this lying:

“Our brains are particularly ill-



AP Photo/Alex Brandon  
President Donald Trump speaks about tax reform at the Loren Cook Co. in Springfield, Mo., on Wednesday.

equipped to deal with lies when they come not singly but in a constant stream, and Trump, we know, lies constantly, about matters as serious as the election results and as trivial as the tiles at Mar-a-Lago.”

She continued: “When we

**This is not simply about a flawed man, this is about the function of our democracy and American positioning in the world. ... Without truth, everything falls apart, or more precisely, nothing can be established.**

are overwhelmed with false, or potentially false, statements, our brains pretty quickly become so overworked that we stop trying to sift through everything. It’s called cognitive load — our limited cognitive resources are overburdened. It doesn’t matter how implausible the statements are; throw out enough of them, and people will inevitably absorb some. Eventually, without quite realizing it, our brains just give up trying to figure out what is true.”

Trump is quite literally overworking our human capacities with his mendacity. It is not only hard to imagine that any person could lie this much — let alone the leader of

the free world — it is also impossible for us to keep pace.

There a strong impulse, I believe, in each of us struggling against fatigue, to register the pattern and manage expectations. We begin to build into our processing of politics the caveat: Yes, the “president” lies. That’s not new. That’s just what he does.

But we must resist that impulse. It makes normal, or at least rational, something that is neither normal nor rational.

Trump’s incessant lying is obscene. It is a collapse in morality; it is an ethical assault.

This notion that Trump is damaging the sanctity and purity of truth, that truth in the Trump era operates on a floating scale, that for the Trump apologists truth has become a minor inconvenience, should have us all objecting in earnest.

It seems odd that we have to defend the merits of truth, and yet we do. We must.

This is not simply about a flawed man, this is about the function of our democracy and American positioning in the world. How is one supposed to debate policy with someone who almost never tells the truth? How can a liar negotiate treaties or navigate international disputes? Without truth, everything falls apart, or more precisely, nothing can be established.

I vacillate between rage and sorrow that our country has come to such a pass. And yet, what is done is done. America made a colossal mistake, and it cannot be easily undone.

It is cold comfort that most of the country now believes that Trump isn’t a steady or moral or compassionate leader and half believe he isn’t honest, according to a Fox News Poll released last week.

But that acknowledgment doesn’t change the fact that we must develop a societal strategy for protecting the true in a post-truth world, and the first step is that we must never stop saying: Donald Trump is a liar.

## WHERE TO WRITE

- **U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D):** 439 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515. Phone: 202- 225-0855. Fax 202-225-9497. District office: 12725 SW Millikan Way, Suite 220, Beaverton, OR 97005. Phone: 503-469-6010. Fax 503-326-5066. Web: [bonamici.house.gov/](http://bonamici.house.gov/)
- **U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D):** 313 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-3753. Web: [www.merkley.senate.gov](http://www.merkley.senate.gov)
- **U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D):** 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510. Phone:

- 202-224-5244. Web: [www.wyden.senate.gov](http://www.wyden.senate.gov)
- **State Rep. Brad Witt (D):** State Capitol, 900 Court Street N.E., H-373, Salem, OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1431. Web: [www.leg.state.or.us/witt/](http://www.leg.state.or.us/witt/) Email: [rep.bradwitt@state.or.us](mailto:rep.bradwitt@state.or.us)
  - **State Rep. Deborah Boone (D):** 900 Court St. N.E., H-481, Salem, OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1432. Email: [rep.deborah\\_boone@state.or.us](mailto:rep.deborah_boone@state.or.us) District office: P.O. Box 928, Cannon Beach, OR 97110. Phone: 503-986-1432. Web: [www.leg.state.or.us/boone/](http://www.leg.state.or.us/boone/)
  - **State Sen. Betsy Johnson (D):**

- State Capitol, 900 Court St. N.E., S-314, Salem, OR 97301. Telephone: 503-986-1716. Email: [sen.betsyjohnson@state.or.us](mailto:sen.betsyjohnson@state.or.us) Web: [www.betsyjohnson.com](http://www.betsyjohnson.com) District Office: P.O. Box R, Scappoose, OR 97056. Phone: 503-543-4046. Fax: 503-543-5296. Astoria office phone: 503-338-1280.
- **Port of Astoria:** Executive Director, 10 Pier 1 Suite 308, Astoria, OR 97103. Phone: 503-741-3300. Email: [admin@portofastoria.com](mailto:admin@portofastoria.com)
  - **Clatsop County Board of Commissioners:** c/o County Manager, 800 Exchange St., Suite 410, Astoria, OR 97103. Phone: 503-325-1000.