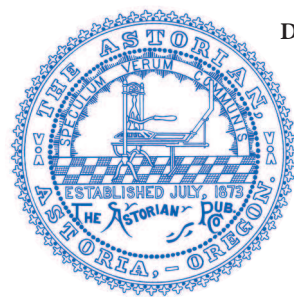


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OUR VIEW



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Logging in parts of the Bear Creek watershed near Astoria recently resulted in greater than expected revenue. Harvests typically account for less than 25 percent of the growth in the area, according to city staff.

Astoria wise to invest in watershed

It has become commonplace among political elites to observe that clean, fresh water will increasingly become one of the world's most precious and fought-over resources as this century progresses.

Astoria leaders couldn't have known this decades ago when a series of wise decisions led to acquisition of the city's forest watershed, but we and future generations will have ample reasons to be thankful for their understanding of water's importance.

In late August, The Daily Astorian provided a thorough update on the city's watershed and ongoing management of its timber. Routinely thinning the forest enhances its health and biological diversity, while improving fire safety and generating revenue and forestry jobs.

Last month's logging yielded \$228,651 net revenue for the city, mostly from harvesting non-native, disease-prone trees. Much of the native vegetation was preserved, including healthy spruce, hemlock and Pacific silver fir. Watershed managers are systematically steering the forest away from Douglas fir, the species favored in the region's intensely harvested industrial tree plantations. Carefully planned harvests within the watershed take pains to avoid creating erosion, sedimentation and other impacts on water quality and the environment.

Water originating in the city's wholly owned 3,700-acre forest once fed the city's booming canneries and now supplies its breweries. It includes 32 miles of stream and tributaries, Bear Creek Reservoir, Middle Lake and Wickiup Lake.

The city's forest is a thriving storehouse for carbon that could otherwise be contributing to global climate problems. Astoria was paid \$2.2 million two years ago when it enrolled in a carbon-credit program — essentially being paid to not aggressively harvest for the next 20 years. The city has since sold an additional \$40,000 worth of carbon credits. Funds have been spent on city firefighting equipment and also placed in the capital improvement fund.

It would be hard to overstate the long-term importance of Astoria's watershed management choices. Although, unlike much of the world, precipitation is actually forecast to increase in the Pacific Northwest in coming decades, we will also struggle with increasing population pressure and the need to manage more-intense rainfall events.

Only time will tell whether forecasts are accurate. But smart planning — past, present and future — puts Astoria in a far more advantageous position than countless other places in a changing world. Even now, it isn't too late for all surrounding communities to slowly make similar investments in healthy watersheds. It will be more difficult and expensive than when Astoria did so, but a great bargain compared to what it will cost 50 years from now.

It would be hard to overstate the long-term importance of Astoria's watershed management choices



Complacency could kill health care law

By PAUL KRUGMAN
New York Times News Service

I haven't yet read Hillary Clinton's "What Happened," but it seems pretty clear to me what did, in fact, happen in 2016.

These days, America starts from a baseline of extreme tribalism: 47 or 48 percent of the electorate will vote for any Republican, no matter how terrible, and against any Democrat, no matter how good. This means, in turn, that small things — journalists acting like mean kids in high school, ganging up on candidates they consider uncool, events that suggest fresh scandal even when there's nothing there — can tip the balance in favor of even the worst candidate imaginable.

And, crucially, last year far too many people were complacent; they assumed that Donald Trump couldn't possibly become president, so they felt free to engage in trivial pursuits. Then they woke up to find that the inconceivable had happened.

Is something similar about to go down with health care?

Republican attempts to destroy Obamacare have repeatedly failed, and for very good reason. Their attacks on the Affordable Care Act were always based on lies, and they have never come up with a decent alternative.

The simple fact is that all the major elements of the ACA — prohibiting discrimination by insurers based on medical history, requiring that people buy insurance even if they're currently healthy, premium subsidies and Medicaid expansion that make insurance affordable even for those with lower incomes — are there because they're necessary. Yet every plan Republicans have offered would do away with or undermine those key elements, causing tens of millions of Americans to lose health insurance, with the heaviest burden falling on the most vulnerable.

All this should be clear to everyone by now. So you might be tempted to assume that no plan along these lines can possibly pass, let alone one that, if anything, looks worse than what we've seen so far. But it's precisely because so many people assume that the threat is behind us, and have turned their attention elsewhere, that health care is once again in danger.

The sponsors of the Graham-Cassidy bill now working its way toward a U.S. Senate vote claim to



AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

U.S. Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., left, and Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., right, talk while walking to a meeting on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., in July. Senate Republicans are planning a final, uphill push to erase President Barack Obama's health care law.

be offering a moderate approach that preserves the good things about Obamacare. In other words, they are maintaining the GOP norm of lying both about the content of Obamacare and about what would replace it.

In reality, Graham-Cassidy is the opposite of moderate. It contains, in exaggerated and almost caricature form, all the elements that made previous Republican proposals so cruel and destructive. It would eliminate the individual mandate, undermine if not effectively eliminate protection for people with pre-existing conditions, and slash funding for subsidies and Medicaid. There are a few additional twists, but they're all bad — notably, a funding formula that would penalize states that are actually successful in reducing the number of uninsured.

Did this bill's sponsors — Lindsey Graham, Bill Cassidy, Ron Johnson and Dean Heller — manage to get through months of health care debate without learning anything about the issue? Maybe. But surely the rest of the Senate, not to mention much of the public, has wised up about false Republican promises. A huge majority of voters, almost 2 to 1, consider it a good thing that previous attempts at repealing and replacing Obamacare failed.

Yet there is a real chance that Graham-Cassidy, which is similar to but even worse than previous Republican proposals, will nonetheless become law, because not enough people are taking it seriously.

As in the presidential election, we start from a baseline of extreme tribalism, in which 48 or 49 Republican senators will vote for anything, no matter how awful, that bears their party's seal of approval. To make a bill the law, its sponsors only need to win one or two more votes.

The main reason Republican leaders couldn't do that on previous health bills was public outrage and activism. Letters and phone calls, demonstrators and crowds at town halls, made it clear that many Americans were aware of the stakes, and that politicians who voted to take health care away from millions would be held accountable.

Now, however, the news cycle has moved on, taking public attention with it. Many progressives have already begun taking Obamacare's achievements for granted, and are moving on from protest against right-wing schemes to dreams of single-payer. Unfortunately, that's exactly the kind of environment in which swing senators, no longer in the spotlight, might be bribed or bullied into voting for a truly terrible bill.

The good news is that for technical reasons of parliamentary procedure, Graham-Cassidy has to pass by the end of this month, or not at all. The bad news is that such passage is a real possibility.

So if you care about preserving the huge gains the ACA has brought, make your voice heard. Otherwise we may wake up to another terrible morning after.

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