

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW



AP Photo/Jeff Barnard

Dead zones in the Pacific Ocean trouble researchers.

Unified action necessary to preserve ocean life

It's troubling to learn "a suffocating ribbon of low oxygen seawater over the continental shelf" expanded northward this summer to impact the North Coast and even Washington's Olympic Peninsula.

Reported this week by Tom Banse of Northwest News Network, dead zones began affecting Oregon's southern near-shore waters around 2000 — representing an acute change from marine oxygen levels in the previous half century. Since 2000, patches of the state's southern continental shelf resemble a watery desert, nothing but dead things littering the bottom. It is a vision of what it would be like if the air we breathe developed invisible pockets devoid of life-giving oxygen, inexorably drifting through towns and countryside killing everything in their path.

Researchers with the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary found "literally no oxygen" at one site. Off the Quinalt Indian Reservation, there were "dead fish and shellfish at various locations and times beginning near the end of July and extending through most of August."

Technically called hypoxia, the lack of oxygen in seawater is, so far, still a localized and patchy problem. But it's easy to see how it can become an apocalypse for sea life and for coastal economies dependent on crabbing and fishing.

Fish are highly mobile and sometimes can move away from unfavorable conditions. It might be this year's mediocre salmon runs in our area and stellar returns in Alaska partly reflect fish "voting with their fins" and shifting northward. Dungeness crab, shellfish and other invertebrates don't have as much ability to flee — though Banse reports that this year "observers noted crabs leaving the ocean to seek more oxygenated waters in coastal estuaries and bays."

It's significant that the Oregon Legislature finds all this sufficiently troubling to warrant creation of a new high-level council to examine what can be done about the problem. The causes of hypoxia are likely to be complex and overlapping various government jurisdictions, but it's possible to imagine that state-level action could be beneficial in curbing runoff of excess fertilizer and other pollutants into the ocean. Such chemicals are known to impact marine life. The state also can play a meaningful role in monitoring and documenting offshore damage, building a case for broader action.

In other respects, dead zones along the edge of the northeast Pacific Ocean may result from much larger problems than any one state can address. Oregon State University researcher Francis Chan pins the problem in part on disrupted ocean circulation patterns and ocean warming. It took a September storm to break up this summer's low-oxygen zones, an intervention no state can hope to influence.

Like citizens of a Dust Bowl town hiring a biplane to seed reluctant rainclouds, on its own Oregon isn't likely to make much difference.

More unified action certainly will be required. For the immediate future, that must consist of cooperative agreements between the West Coast states. Governors of the three mainland Pacific states already have taken some steps to work in concert on climate issues, in part because of an acknowledgment that they are increasingly impacting the ocean. The three states will need to do more, reaching out to British Columbia, Alaska and perhaps even across the ocean to Asia in hopes of forging stronger scientific and resource-management alliances.

Little help can be expected from the feckless Trump administration, which has set about neutering the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and sabotaging international efforts to protect the planet on which we rely. In the face of overwhelming evidence, current federal leaders deny there is a problem. This week's U.S. Department of the Interior announcement of an end to the "war on coal" is in effect a declaration of war on coastal communities that rely on cold and productive ocean water.

Ultimately, all Americans of every political shade will understand it's in our paramount economic and physical interests to get a handle on whatever is turning part of the ocean into a wasteland. Until then, coastal citizens must defend our own interests in every way we can.



To serve is to slobber

By FRANK BRUNI

New York Times News Service

No one besides Donald Trump was going to ask Rex Tillerson to the prom.



No one else was going to pin a corsage on Jeff Sessions, pick up Steven Mnuchin in a chauffeured limo, give a box of Godiva chocolates

to Betsy DeVos.

A more conventional, responsible, admirable president would have looked right past them, at comelier options galore. On some level they know that. Trump certainly does. That's his power over them — a poison in the heart of his Cabinet. He gave them a chance and a dance that they weren't going to get any other way. In return he demands a gratitude that's unhealthy, a deference that's unseemly.

Every presidential administration has its deadbeats and dysfunctions. None that I've observed has an ethos of abject servility like Trump's. That's what we witnessed over the weekend, when the obsequious handmaiden otherwise known as the vice president flew at taxpayer expense to his home state of Indiana for a game between the Indianapolis Colts and the San Francisco 49ers.

Mike Pence merely pretended that he was in the mood for football. He was really in the market for cheap political theater. During the national anthem, when some players predictably took a knee, he took calculated offense, storming out of the stadium and doing his boss proud. Trump tweeted afterward that Pence had been obeying his orders.

Pence has a long and serious political résumé, but would another Republican president have tapped him for the No. 2 spot? I doubt it. I also doubt that another Republican president would have chosen Rick Perry for the Energy Department, Ben Carson for Housing and Urban Development or a host of the people who are working — or worked — just below the Cabinet level.

Sean Spicer? Anthony Scaramucci? They aren't superstars who had been underutilized before. They're opportunists who lunged for an adventure that they had probably never envisioned.

Unlike his predecessors, Trump didn't have his pick of the crop. Some prospects didn't want to be anywhere near such an egomaniacal, unprincipled man, while others were nonstarters because they'd publicly vented their doubts about him.

The team he assembled wasn't all stars. With a few notable exceptions, it was a coalition of the



AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, left, speaks following a meeting with President Donald Trump at Trump National Golf Club in Bedminster, N.J., in August.

willing, and a ragtag one at that. And then, through his example and erratic behavior this year, he systematically diminished these recruits. If they had pride and much of a reputation on their way into the administration, they'll be lucky to hold on to tatters of either on their way out.

The most effective leaders extract the best from the people

The most effective leaders extract the best from the people around them. Trump provokes the worst.

around them. Trump provokes the worst. Tom Price, his ousted health and human services secretary, was shady from the get-go, but still: Would he have acted quite so high-flying and mighty — all those regal seats on all those pricey charters — but for Trump, whose entire rule smacks of economically self-aggrandizing brand promotion and whose family is busting the Secret Service budget?

Would Mnuchin be so blasé about his own use of government planes? According to multiple reports, he charged the government \$800,000 for military transport when commercial flights were available — and Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, too, indulged in needlessly expensive air travel.

Would Scott Pruitt, the director of the Environmental Protection Agency, have spent nearly \$25,000 on some special phone booth? This fish rots from the bejeweled head.

And these people have become practiced at humiliation. Maybe their perks are Percocets for the pain.

Sessions twisted in the wind while Trump, in tweets and talk, rued that he'd ever appointed him attorney general and suggested that he might dismiss him any day. Spicer sucked up Trump's boldly advertised displeasure with his comportment at the lectern and even the color of his suits.

Tillerson tucked his dignity into some sock drawer as Trump repeatedly contradicted his statements and undermined his authority. For Trump this was gleeful sport. He's only as big as his ability to make his underlings look small.

Mnuchin signed on as his Treasury secretary to become his apologist, and was prodded to vouch for the president along lines having nothing to do with his portfolio. On a Sunday morning news show, he dutifully joined Trump's campaign against pro football players who don't stand for the anthem. In a public statement, he docilely claimed that there was no reason — none whatsoever! — to believe that Trump had any patience for neo-Nazis.

I flash back on that infamous Cabinet meeting, when Trump coaxed those insane testimonials, and see more clearly than ever that he was establishing the terms of service: I strut, you slobber, for as long as I can stand you or you can stand it.

Which won't be forever, and that's the scariest part. Trump's options will grow less attractive, not more. On the far side of this uncomely crowd, there's an even sorer, more simpering crew of replacements.

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