

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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A Strive for Five campaign is meant to improve school attendance.

## Showing up matters, especially in school

It has been another month of distressing news for an Oregon education system that continues to rank among the worst in the country.

Administration after administration, from state government all the way down to local school districts, have promised reforms and improvement.

Yet new initiatives, new tests to measure progress, new management, new programs and new funding sources always seem stymied — they lack follow-through, sending Oregon education back where it started, though pointed in a different direction.

On Oct. 11, Oregon's chief state schools officer Salam Noor resigned under pressure from Gov. Kate Brown. That's the same governor who handpicked Noor to oversee the state's K-12 schools little more than two years ago. According to the governor's press secretary, Brown said she was no longer satisfied with Noor's ability to execute her vision.

So back to square one for Oregon education. Back to the back of the pack, at least for now.

From a local perspective, school districts received their annual "report cards" the next day and they were a mixed bag. In Clatsop County the grades were far from straight As, but not among the failing marks either. But they show there is plenty of room to improve in test scores, graduation rates and other performance measures.

One standout statistic is poor school attendance, which we recently spotlighted in a Daily Astorian story on Clatsop County school districts' fight against chronic absenteeism.

The state defines "regular attenders" as students who attend at least 90 percent of the school year and most schools across the state fall far below that level. Statistics show that students who fall below that mark test well below those who show up reliably, so showing up for class not only matters, it matters a great deal.

Statewide, the numbers are nowhere near good enough, and unfortunately the Astoria School District closely follows the state average, with nearly 20 percent of students missing at least 10 percent of possible school days last year. That's a 1 percent increase from the prior year. The Seaside School District led the county in chronic absenteeism last school year with 24 percent of students not regularly attending, followed by Knappa with 22.3 percent and Jewell with 21.1 percent. The Warrenton-Hammond School District was at 14.5 percent, the lowest in the county. Warrenton had posted a 9 percent chronic absenteeism rate in 2014-15 that doubled to 18.5 percent in 2015-16 before decreasing last year.

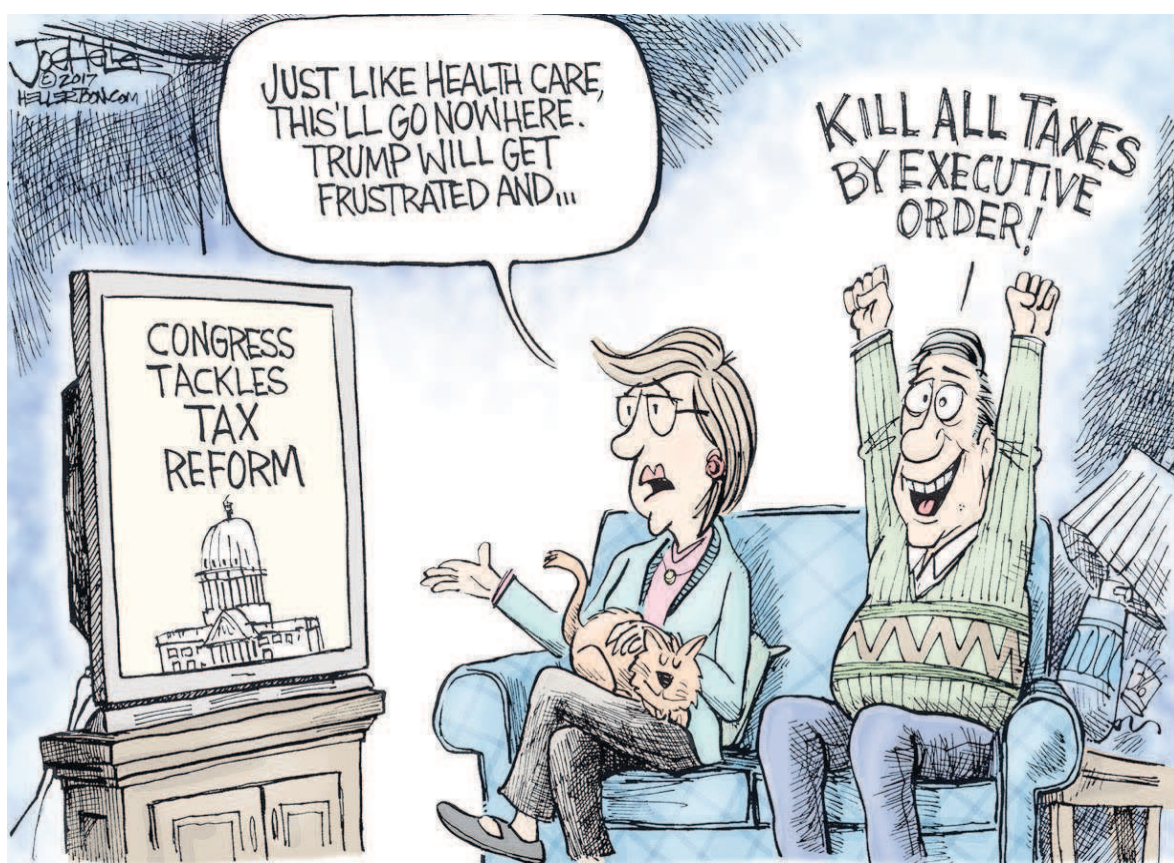
The Astoria district this year launched Strive for Five, an attendance campaign with a goal for students to miss no more than a week of school the entire year. Astoria Superintendent Craig Hoppes says the campaign has raised awareness about attendance, an issue the school district plans to highlight often throughout the year.

That's good — the disturbing absenteeism numbers need great improvement.

Much of the education system can seem bureaucratic, generic and random. But one of the best things we can do to get our students through school is to get them to school.

Accept only legitimate excuses — contagious illness the obvious one. Get your child to class and the state's statistics, and our community as a whole, will no doubt improve.

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## Flake's defiant surrender

By ROSS DOUTHAT  
New York Times News Service

In 1911, in the midst of a debate about whether Britain's House of Lords should willingly give up its veto power over legislation or fight a doomed battle to retain its privileges, a British peer, Lord Selborne, framed the debate for his fellow lords this way: "The question is, shall we perish in the dark, slain by our own hand, or in the light, killed by our enemies?"

A similar question has confronted Republican politicians throughout the age of Donald Trump, and again and again they have chosen to die in the dark.

This was true of Trump's strongest primary-season rivals, who fought him directly and concertedly during exactly one of the umpteenth debates and then, finding open war hard going, chose to lose and bow out as though Trump were a normal rival rather than the fundamentally unfit figure they had described just a few short weeks before.

It was true of the party functionaries, the hapless Reince Priebus above all, who denied the residual Republican forces resisting Trump the chance to fight him one last time in the light of the convention floor.

It was true of the party's leaders in Washington, D.C., both the men of savvy and the men of honor, who came up with endless excuses for why they couldn't take on Trump directly before he won the nomination and put party over conviction thereafter. It was true of Paul Ryan; it was true even of John McCain.

It was not true of everyone. Mitt Romney and John Kasich declined to fall on the sword of party unity; so did George W. Bush and his father; so did some governors and a few junior senators, Mike Lee and Ben Sasse and Jeff Flake.

But what was notable about these holdouts was that while they refused to make the quietus, to strangle their own convictions in Trump's ample shadow, they declined many chances to keep up the fight openly as well.

The nomination of a figure like Trump, a clear threat to both the professed beliefs of his party's leaders and to basic competence in presidential government, is the sort of shattering event that in the past would have prompted a real schism or independent candidacy. But Romney couldn't talk Kasich into being that independent candidate, all the other possibilities demurred — and then as a group, the Republican resisters declined to endorse anyone, neither Hillary Clinton nor the Libertarian ticket nor Evan McMullin, making their opposition a private matter rather than a public challenge to the nominee.

Now, almost a year into the Trump presidency, a similar dynamic is playing out. There is a small but significant Republican opposition to Trump, but its leading figures still don't want to go to war with him directly, preferring philosophical attacks and tactical withdrawal to confrontation and probable defeat.

Bob Corker, part of the dying-in-the-dark-isn't-so-bad caucus during the primary campaign (and when he seemed to hope for a Cabinet appointment), has become a fierce Trump critic — but



AP Photo/Andrew Harnik  
U.S. Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Arizona, accompanied by his wife, Cheryl, leaves the Capitol in Washington, D.C., Tuesday after announcing he won't seek re-election in 2018.

**The Republican establishment, like the House of Lords a century back, has the feel of a fated and superannuated institution that no stratagem can save.**

only after deciding to retire from the Senate. George W. Bush and John McCain have each given speeches that read like broadsides against Trump — but very general critiques of his worldview, not political attacks on the man himself. And now Jeff Flake of Arizona has delivered a barnburner of a Senate address about the civic costs of the Trump presidency — while simultaneously declaring that because he can't win his primary in a Trumpified party, he won't even stay and fight it out.

To the extent that there's a plausible theory behind all of these halfhearted efforts, it's that resisting Trump too vigorously only strengthens his hold on the party's base, by vindicating his claim to have all the establishment arrayed against him.

But the problem with this logic is that it offers a permanent excuse for doing nothing, no matter how bad Trump's reign becomes. ("I'd criticize him for accidentally nuking Manila, but you know, then Fox News would just make it all about me ...") In the end, if you want Republican voters to reject Trumpism, you need to give them clear electoral opportunities to do so — even if you expect defeat, even if it's all but certain. And an anti-Trump movement that gives high-minded speeches but never mounts candidates confirms Trump's claim to face establishment opposition while also confirming his judgment of the establishment's guts and stamina — proving that they're all low-energy, all "liddle" men, all unwilling to fight him man to man.

If Corker really means what he keeps saying about the danger posed by Trump's effective incapacity, he should call openly for impeachment or for 25th Amendment proceedings — and other anti-Trump Republicans should join him. If Flake really means what he said in his impassioned speech, and he doesn't want to waste time and energy on a foredoomed Senate primary campaign, then he should choose a different hopeless-seeming cause and primary Trump in 2020. George W. Bush should endorse him. So

should McCain, and Corker, and Romney, and Kasich, and Sasse, and the rest of the anti-Trump list. They should expect to lose, and badly, but they should make Trump actually defeat them, instead of just clearing the field for his second nomination.

And not only for the sake of their honor. The president's GOP critics should engage in electoral battle because the act of campaigning, the work of actually trying to persuade voters, is the only way anti-Trump Republicans will come to grips with the legitimate reasons that their ideas had become so unpopular that voters opted for demagoguery instead.

A speechifying anti-Trumpism, distant from the fray, will always be self-regarding and self-deceiving — unwilling to see how the Iraq War discredited both the Bushist and McCainian styles of right-wing internationalism, incapable of addressing the economic disappointments that turned voters against Flake's Goldwaterite libertarianism and Romney's "trust me, I'm a businessman" promises. Only in actual political competition can the Republican elite reckon with why it lost its party, and how it might win again without succumbing to Trumpian indecency.

I don't expect this to happen; indeed I think the GOP is more likely to be renewed by someone who currently supports Trump or someone not yet active in politics than it is by the men resisting the president today. The Republican establishment, like the House of Lords a century back, has the feel of a fated and superannuated institution that no stratagem can save. In the end the Lords chose to perish in the dark, to vote themselves into irrelevance. Defiant retirements no less than craven collaboration are likely to carry the GOP's present leaders to the same unhappy destination, the same ultimate irrelevance.

But they are not there yet. And men like Flake and Corker, who right now have the not-quite-admirable courage of men abandoning the fray, still have time enough and light enough in which to stand and fight.