

## Church and state

Two weeks ago the Ales & Ideas crew put on an enlightening and well-attended panel discussion addressing church/state separation. The event, "Imperiled: Church/State Separation in America," focused on several of the more egregious attempts by President Donald Trump's administration to breach the wall of separation. From the feedback I received, it's clear many people understand and respect the importance of maintaining a healthy separation between the church and state.

Issues like allowing a baker to refuse customers based on their sexual identities, and allowing tax dollars to support private schools are not just illegal, but they're plain wrong. Unfortunately, compared with more pressing issues, church/state separation isn't a priority for many people, and we often don't realize our rights are in jeopardy until it's too late.

Write to your representatives. Let them know how you feel about our First Amendment right of keeping the religious and secular separate. Be vigilant.

ED JOYCE  
Astoria

## Fighting hunger

Dear friends and neighbors: Imagine our community without hunger; we can, and we hope you can, too. Our South County Food Bank, a local food pantry, works seven days a week to provide emergency food and hope to over 1,000 community members each month. Each year, over 250,000 pounds of food is coordinated, collected, sorted, set out and individually distributed, one on one, by volunteers to our most vulnerable friends and neighbors living in our area.

We need your help now to continue this essential work. For the first time, we are sending out a call to action brochure, in the mail, to all residents in South County. Please take the time to read it and get to know the good work of your food pantry and the enormous challenge we are facing around the most basic need for any person: nutritious food.

For more information about our good work, stop by our new building at 2041 N. Roosevelt Drive, call 503-738-9800, go online to [www.seasidefoodbank.org](http://www.seasidefoodbank.org) or follow us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/seasideoregonfoodpantry](http://www.facebook.com/seasideoregonfoodpantry)

We sincerely thank you for your continued help and support as we work toward a community without hunger.

MARY BLAKE  
Board member, South County  
Food Bank  
Seaside

## Missing the point?

The recent flurry of sexual misconduct allegations prompts me to wonder whether we're over-

looking merit while condemning the misbehaviors of Roy Moore, Al Franken, Ben Affleck, Harvey Weinstein, George H.W. Bush, Kevin Spacey and Louis C. K.

I don't condone their bad deeds, and they certainly deserve our scorn and owe us meaningful apologies, along with behavioral correction. But does that misconduct, past or present, preclude their ability to competently perform the tasks they're known for?

Roy Moore may well be sexually deviant, but I'm more concerned about his ability to represent 3,330,802 Alabamians in the U.S. Senate. What about other issues like his record on race, being twice removed from the Alabama Supreme Court, espousing anti-Muslim and anti-gay views, and affiliating with white nationalist groups? Those issues should matter more as voters consider whether to check an R or a D in December.

And what about performers like Affleck? Does his indiscretion somehow impede the Oscar-winner's ability to occupy center stage, providing serious or amusing dramatic moments? After all, President Donald Trump has tweeted how much he's looking forward to Affleck's yet-to-be released Batman film.

During a Nov. 16 interview on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," Affleck affirmed that men should be much more mindful of their behavior toward women and hold themselves accountable, becoming part of the solution. They could, he asserted, achieve a redemption of sorts.

Despite the disturbing revelations, some redeemed celebrity men could actually serve as role models, despite their blemished reputations. Maybe too many of us have shrunk our perspectives about those notables to preclude something positive that may come of their course corrections.

Just wondering.

ROBERT BRAKE  
Ocean Park, Washington

## Having it both ways

Thank you for the editorial about building our economy ("Oregon governor should confront climate change in ways that help economy, as well as environment," The Daily Astorian, Nov. 20). I'm delighted that Oregon and other states acknowledge climate change, and want to support more sustainable, resilient state economies.

It's great that Gov. Kate Brown attended the United Nation's global climate change conference in Germany. I applaud Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley's support of the Paris climate accords and efforts to publicize the issue and mobilize Oregonians and others to get active.

And yet, and yet ... Brown, Merkley and Wyden refuse to speak out to oppose the Jordan Cove liquefied natural gas (LNG) export terminal and pipeline proposed for Coos Bay and five Oregon counties. It's such a bad fossil fuel proposal that even the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission turned it down, but, as in all things with massive potential profits, it's

back with tweaks to its application and with the support of President Donald Trump's administration.

Oregonians have been fighting this proposal for about 13 years, costing opponents money, work, anguish and trust in their elected leaders. It took nearly 12 years to defeat the two LNG terminals and pipelines proposed for Clatsop County; southern Oregon has no end in sight to their fight.

It appears Brown, Merkley and Wyden want it both ways: to protect our planet from fossil fuels and to aid in the damage and destruction of our state and planet from fossil fuels. It's possible they believe the industry's illusory promises about new jobs; or choose to ignore the booming growth in green energy jobs across the country and world; or don't want to offend their traditional campaign donors; or are embracing hypocrisy.

Such a shame for three such talented people to miss this significant opportunity to promote Oregon as a leader of this nation's turn to a green economy. What will it take for them to take a stand against Jordan Cove?

Laurie Caplan  
Astoria

## Toys for Tots time

From 2006 through 2009, I was honored to have coordinated the Marine Corps League Detachment 1228 Toys for Tots toy drive in and around Clatsop County. During that period of time, my after action reports show that our

detachment distributed 15,425 toys to the families in Clatsop County.

This was done by volunteers working at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds, and those who drove to outlying areas and delivered toys to schools, churches, meeting halls, veterans organizations, police and fire departments. All of these people then helped give the toys to the families and their children. A great effort by all.

In 2010, the Marine Corps League continued to this day, collecting and distributing toys to children all over Clatsop County. The local league is known as the Daniel E. Crockett Marine Corps League. The present commander is Lou Neubecker who resides in Seaside, with his lovely wife, Beverly. Coordinator Neubecker has carried on the fine tradition of Toys for Tots in Clatsop County with strong assistance from the members of the league.

I am asking the community to continue to support the Toys for Tots by locating one of the many Toys for Tots boxes in your area and help fill it with packages of new toys for all ages, from baby to 18 years old. For information on locating a box, or seeking a league member to pick up your donation, please call Lou or Beverly Neubecker at 503-717-0152 or 501-717-2269 (cell). As Lou is involved with the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Seaside American Legion, he is an excellent contact for your donation of toys. Thank you and Semper Fi.

MEL JASMIN  
Warrenton

# Lies, incoherence and rage on tax cuts

By PAUL KRUGMAN  
New York Times News Service

One thing you can count on in 21st-century U.S. politics is that Republicans will lie about taxes. They did it under George W. Bush, they did it under Barack Obama and they're still doing it under Donald Trump.

Yet this time is different. It's not just that the lies have gotten even more brazen. There's now a combination of incoherence and rage that we, or at least I, haven't seen before. These days, they can't even seem to get their fake story straight — and they literally start yelling obscenities when someone tries to point out the facts.

GOP lies about taxes generally involve two issues: who is hurt or helped by tax changes, and what these changes will do to the budget.

Thus, when Bush cut taxes in 2001 and 2003, he and his party repeatedly insisted that the tax cuts were primarily for the middle class. In fact, while there were some middle-class tax breaks in the package, such as an increase in the child tax credit, these were dwarfed by cuts in tax rates on high incomes, reduced taxes on dividends and repeal of the estate tax. Overall, the richest 1 percent saw a much larger increase in after-tax income than middle-class families did.

At the same time, the Bush administration used a series of gimmicks to hide the true fiscal cost of the plan, such as delaying the imple-



AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

House Speaker Paul Ryan, joined by House Republicans, speaks to the media following a vote on tax reform, on Capitol Hill in Washington last week.

mentation of some tax cuts while pretending that others would expire when the actual intention was to make them permanent.

When Obama took office, these tricks were simply flipped on their head. Republicans insisted, falsely, that Obama had imposed a "massive tax increase" on the middle class; in fact, for the most part he actually cut middle-class taxes. Meanwhile, they insisted that the surge in the budget deficit caused by the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis was permanent, and ridiculed the Obama

administration's claims that deficits would fall sharply once crisis spending ended and tax receipts recovered; in fact, that's exactly what happened.

## What's different?

So what's different this time? As in the Bush years, Republicans are claiming to be offering a middle-class tax cut. But where Bush truly was cutting taxes on the middle class, just much less than he was on the wealthy, current Republican plans would raise those taxes

on many lower- and middle-income families, even as they go down for the wealthy. (Steven Mnuchin, the Treasury secretary, claims that only "million-dollar earners" would see tax increases. This is the opposite of the truth.)

Oh, and a memo to journalists: If you play it safe by reporting this as "Democrats say" that middle-class taxes will go up, you're misleading your readers: Those estimates come from the Joint Committee on Taxation, Congress' own nonpartisan scorekeeper.

How can Republicans like Paul Ryan, the speaker of the House, pretend to be helping the middle class? It depends crucially on a new kind of budget gimmick: Both the House and Senate tax-cut bills do contain some middle-class tax breaks — but only for the first few years. Then they expire.

Take one of Ryan's favorite examples, a family with two children and earning \$59,000 a year. That family would indeed get a tax break next year. But the break would rapidly dwindle and turn into a tax increase by 2024.

The Republican response is to claim that these tax breaks wouldn't really expire, that Congress would eventually renew them. That's quite doubtful — and even if true, it means that the tax plans would add much more to the national debt than the GOP admits. Which brings me to the whole budget deficit issue.

## Deeply concerned

Not long ago, leading Republicans claimed to be deeply concerned about budget deficits. Only

fools and centrists took the Republicans seriously. Still, the abrupt shift to nonchalance about adding trillions to the debt in order to cut taxes on corporations and the wealthy is causing a bit of whiplash even among cynics. How do they justify the shift?

Well, they don't seem to have settled on a story. Mnuchin keeps asserting that tax cuts will pay for themselves, going so far as to claim (falsely) that Treasury has released a study showing this. Mick Mulvane, the budget director, cheerfully acknowledges that they're using gimmicks to pass a bill that permanently cuts taxes on corporations, and not to worry. Whatever works, it seems.

So we're really looking at an unprecedented level of dishonesty here. But what happens when you try to explain what's going on? When Sen. Sherrod Brown tried to point out, correctly, that the Senate GOP's tax bill heavily favors the rich, Sen. Orrin Hatch exploded, calling it "bull crap" and asserting that he grew up poor (which is relevant why, exactly?).

Sorry, but this isn't the righteous anger of a man falsely accused of wrongdoing. It's the rage on men always exhibit when caught out in their con.

But what's the con about? The very incoherence of the arguments Republicans are making for their plans shows that it's not about helping the economy, let alone ordinary families. It really is about making the rich richer, at everyone else's expense. If this be bull crap, make the most of it.

