

# OPINION

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## OUR VIEW

# Lost lives serve as deadly reminder of surf dangers

**A** weekend clam-digging adventure came to a sorrowful end for two families last weekend when women drowned in Pacific County. Questions are being raised about how two deaths occurred miles apart within minutes of one another under startlingly similar circumstances.

It should first be said that residents of western Washington and Oregon are, for the most part, fairly familiar with the rewards and risks of ocean beaches. In particular, some razor clam diggers have characteristics in common with ardent football fans, who attend games and tailgate parties in sometimes-appalling conditions. Most clammers would be irritated if a “nanny state” were to be overly zealous in curtailing the hours and conditions in which digging is allowed.

These aren't the first fatal incidents involving clam diggers. For example, in late January 2004, a couple drowned while clamming together at Leadbetter Point, where one of this weekend's deaths also happened. In addition, there are countless accounts of clammers of all ages and physical conditions being tumbled in the surf. If anything, locally there is considerable wonder that more fatalities don't occur. Children and

adults who aren't entirely sure of foot are perhaps the most vulnerable, but even strong and confident adults have close calls.

At all times of the year, out-of-town visitors are far more likely to have trouble than locals. However, summertime drownings tend to impact overly confident young people, whereas fall and winter clamming places a wide range of age groups in and near the ocean. The desire to access clam beds at low tide, in areas usually covered by surf, tempts diggers to go westward where they will certainly be partially submerged by incoming waves. Enthusiastic diggers willingly accept getting wet to their knees or even thighs.

But this means they violate advice from local safety and rescue experts, who say that it is never safe to swim — or even wade — at local beaches. Due to cold water temperatures, the lack of lifeguards, floating logs and other debris, and a very strong rip current, the water here is dangerous, even when it appears to be calm. Additionally, large “sneaker waves” can occur at any time.

It may have been a sneaker wave that was responsible for last Friday's nearly simultaneous drownings on either side of the mouth of Willapa Bay. More



Nighttime clamming places people near the ocean's dangerous surf zone.

detailed analysis in coming days may pinpoint other risk factors.

For now, clam diggers, surfperch fishermen and anyone else who comes into contact with the surf zone should obey these common-sense precautions:

- Always keep a close watch on the ocean for sneaker waves, the incoming tide and floating debris.

- It's best to avoid going more than knee-deep in the water in this area, which is notorious for drownings. If recreational activities necessitate contact with the ocean, strongly consider wearing a life preserver. Clammers must always be aware that hip and chest waders contribute to mishaps if they are over-topped by seawater.

- Parents who do allow children to wade should have a sober adult stay within arms' reach of them at all times.

- Anyone who spots a swimmer in distress should call 911 immediately, rather than attempting to rescue them. Stay on shore and try to provide emergency responders with as much information as possible about the victim's location, activity and appearance.

- Diggers should bear in mind the ratio of risk to reward in going into the surf zone. Nighttime digs can be especially problematic. No clam is worth risking or losing your life.

This weekend's drownings were deeply upsetting to all involved. Beyond the families and friends of the victims, emergency responders feel anguish and strain while trying to save lives or recover bodies. These were grueling hours for all. They deserve community thanks for their efforts.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Every voice matters at town halls

Oregonians of all political parties are fortunate that our U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley hold town halls in every county every year. In contrast, some members of Congress refuse to hold town halls, and block some constituents from contacting them.

I was pleased to see about 200 people at Sen. Wyden's town hall Feb. 3 in Astoria. It was the first town hall for about a third of the audience. Numbers were drawn by lottery for people to ask questions.

People asked Sen. Wyden about many topics, including the new tax law, drilling off the Oregon coast, and earthquake preparedness. These are issues everyone cares about, regardless of political party. In fact, Sen. Wyden mentioned that bipartisan work in Congress goes on all the time.

So I'm especially discouraged that a few questioners made insulting generalizations about Republican voters. This did nothing to bridge the political divisions among us and was disrespectful, especially since there were Republican constituents at this nonpartisan town hall.

I wish that more people of all political persuasions had been there and had their numbers drawn to ask questions. How can Sen. Wyden know what's on our minds — and what we want him to know and do — if we don't show up to tell him?

Clatsop County is fortunate that Senators Wyden and Merkley and Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici work well with others and want to hear from all their constituents. Please plan to attend the next town hall — and bring your questions.

Laurie Caplan  
Astoria

### Seaside schools should focus on graduation

This Wednesday evening, the Seaside School District is holding a community meeting to help develop its five-year strategic plan. They are asking the community for input with the following questions:

What do you value most?

What are the most important indicators that measure student success?

What would you like to see improved?

What are we doing well?

What other roles besides academics should we be involved in?

Oregon's graduation rate rose 1 percentage point with the class of 2016, a disappointingly modest increase, given the state's No. 48 national ranking ([bit.ly/2BZ5hPb](http://bit.ly/2BZ5hPb)).

The national graduation average is 85 percent; Oregon is third-worst in the nation at 74 percent. Seaside's on-time graduation rate is 67 percent ([bit.ly/2E1YqDX](http://bit.ly/2E1YqDX)).

Given this performance, the answers to the district's questions should be clearly obvious.

Stephen Malkowski  
Seaside

### A 2018 wish list

President Donald Trump's elaborately-staged State of the Union address seemed surreal in many respects, but my 2018 wish list may be more palatable.

America would be a better country if race was never an issue, immigrants were welcomed, cancer had a cure, diversity was valued, everyone respected facts, and traffic jams were inconceivable.

America would be “great again” if we didn't need jails, rude people could be ticketed and fined, everyone loved to learn for the sake of learning, apathy was unheard of, and big-band songs made the Top 40.

I'd find it wonderful if we could not only teach old dogs new tricks, but make them computer-literate, children didn't have to worry, all parents were good ones, and grandparents spent more time with grandkids.

I'd want children to look up to Mother Teresa as much as they do to Taylor Swift or Britney Spears.

I'd fervently hope that America's leaders regarded global warming as potentially cataclysmic — and did something about it.

And I'd welcome a new focus on things that really matter — child care, education, health care for all, science, the arts, prevention of violence, prison reform, caring for the homeless, and reducing hunger and poverty — rather than focusing so much attention on our individual need for “more.”

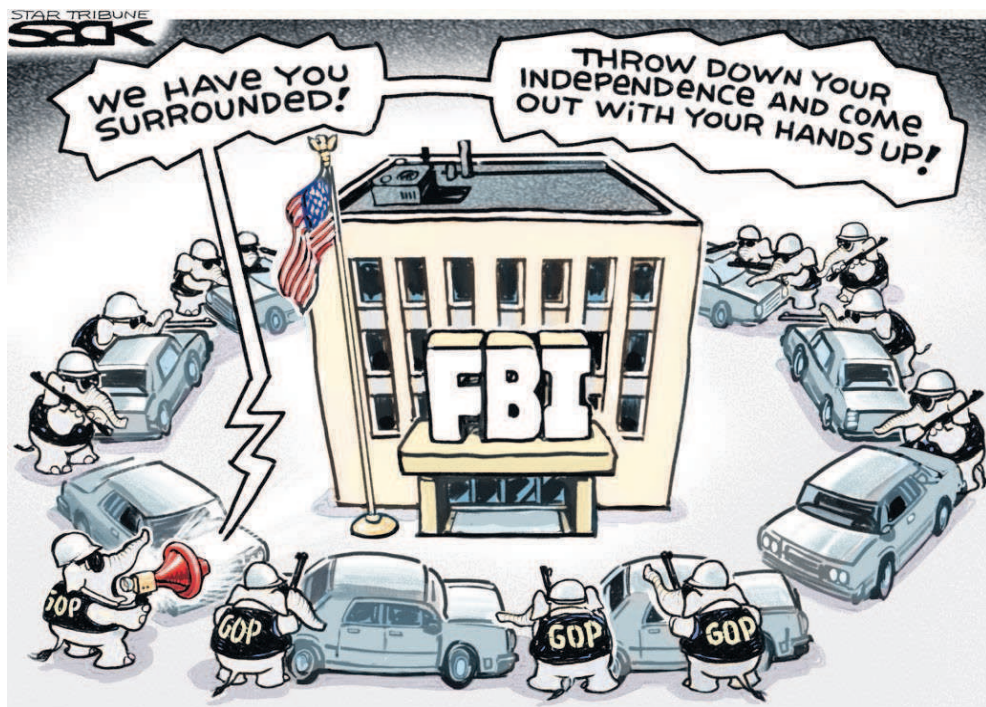
Hamlet discussed a “consummation devoutly to be wished,” but my wish list remains something to ponder, don't you think?

Robert Brake  
Ocean Park

### Unchecked demands drive teacher turnover

I am writing this letter in response to the editorial “Oregon's graduation rate is abysmal” (The Daily Astorian, Jan. 30). Valuable insight can be gained by asking teachers and students to evaluate flaws in their education system. I believe that excessive emphasis is placed on the opinions and beliefs of administration officials. Education administrators typically have a layer of separation between themselves and the day-to-day operations, which teachers experience first-hand.

The article also puts forth the strange idea that new and inexperienced teachers are responsible for falling graduation rates. The training and schooling required for becoming a certified teacher is both extensive and well-focused. Many student teachers also begin their career as substitute teachers as an extended introduction



## LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar, and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mentioning the

writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner. Letters in poor taste will not be printed.

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to the profession. These newly minted teachers are also the most susceptible to burning out, and have an especially high turnover rate, due to ever-increasing and unchecked demands by administrators to “do more with less.”

If the author truly believes the solution to our community's falling graduation rates is to increase the length of student teaching experience, then we should also re-evaluate how student teachers are compensated. If student teachers become the equivalent of unpaid interns, the turnover rate for these new teachers will undoubtedly increase as well.

Dave Johnsen  
Astoria

### Warrenton schools didn't improve by accident

Congratulations to the Warrenton-Hammond School Board, superintendent, principals,

teachers, staff and volunteers “Astoria, Seaside graduation rates dip,” (The Daily Astorian, Jan. 25). The positive news about our graduation rates improving for at least six years didn't happen by accident. Each one of these people deserve our praise for their teamwork to get here.

I would like to especially thank Crystal Salmi's reading program and the volunteers who are involved. I have always maintained that poor readers will fall behind and are more apt to drop out. This effort will pay dividends for life. With the new vocational-technical program in process here in Warrenton, many more students will stay in school and be ready for the work force. Instead of minimum wage jobs, they will have tools to advance their income and education. Good tradespeople are always in demand.

Thank you from our community, we are proud of you.

Charles Bergerson  
Warrenton