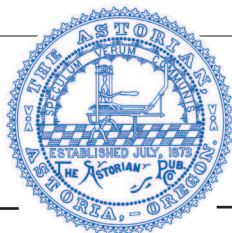


# OPINION

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# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

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## OUR VIEW

# Mercy, wisdom key to opioid response

Opioid overdoses are killing an average of 115 Americans a day, with 40 percent involving prescription painkillers. Opioids accounted for two-thirds of the country's 63,600 overdose deaths in 2016.

Frightening statistics like these have become mind numbing and might be dismissed as typical government scare tactics were it not for the fact that Americans personally experience opioid-related losses and see the impacts in our communities. Here near the mouth of the Columbia River, unavoidable clues include arrest reports, needle exchanges and the swelling industry of addiction recovery.

Intertwined in the complexities of getting a handle on opioid damage is the fact that severe pain is a profound everyday crisis for millions in the country and thousands in the Lower Columbia communities.

With a population that skews distinctly older than average, many of whom have led physically strenuous careers, pain control is a vital public service here. Any effort to lessen the toll of opioid deaths must carefully determine how to alleviate suffering.

### Not just enforcement

The Trump administration's newly appointed opioid coordinator in the U.S. Department of Justice, Mary Daly, has witnessed the crisis ramp up during her 13 years as a drug prosecutor in New York and Virginia. She promises "aggressive enforcement," something we all agree is appropriate when it comes to dealers in heroin and the powerful new synthetic opioid fentanyl. There will be much less support for imprisoning those caught using the drugs, for whom treatment and efforts at recovery remain the most humane and cost-effective options.

An East Coast addiction-treatment advocate expressed a view to National Public Radio that many ordinary U.S.

citizens share: "Good drug policy is about balance between reducing supply and reducing demand, and a lot of the language and rhetoric that comes out does feel a little too heavy on the law enforcement side."

Much of what is happening in terms of government response to the opioid epidemic isn't happening in criminal justice, but in regulations on the federal and state levels. These are obviously of great importance in keeping more people from getting stuck on the addiction treadmill. At the same time, such steps require more nuance and flexibility than bureaucracies typically are able to bring to such sensitive matters.

In late March, for example, the New York Times published an in-depth story with this headline that caught the attention of many pain sufferers and their loved ones: "Medicare Is Cracking Down on Opioids. Doctors Fear Pain Patients Will Suffer." Medicare's amended rules, which have been set for final approval this month, seriously limit payments for long-term, high-dose prescriptions. Unless it is modified in some

**There will be much less support for imprisoning those caught using the drugs, for whom treatment and efforts at recovery remain the most humane and cost-effective options.**



AP Photo/Elise Amendola  
President Donald Trump gestured as he spoke about his plan to combat opioid drug addiction at Manchester Community College in March.

way, Medicare will start denying coverage for pain prescriptions equivalent to 90 milligrams or more of morphine daily, except for patients with cancer or in end-of-life hospice care. Not only will this affect more than 14 million whose pain drugs are covered by Medicare, but private insurance companies and hospitals often pattern their own coverage policies after Medicare. Clumsily done, this will hurt.

### Nuance needed

"A lot of the opioid dose escalation between 2006 and 2011 was terribly ill advised," a pain physician told the Times. "But every week I'm trying to mitigate the trauma that results when patients are taken off opioids by clinicians who feel scared. There are superb doctors who taper as part of a consensual process that involves setting up a true care plan. But this isn't it."

Such transitions off opioids will be

even trickier here and other rural areas, where physician-guided alternative pain care is scarce, and where tight finances and poor health make it hard to obtain care along the Interstate 5 corridor.

For many, staying off opioids is easier than getting off them. Moving forward, the World Health Organization supports a three-step approach that begins with nondrug therapies for pain, including physical therapy, massage, exercise and education. The next step could be a weak opioid, possibly coupled with something else, such as an antidepressant. Only as a last resort would stronger opioids be prescribed, with ongoing efforts to identify less potentially damaging alternatives. All this is reasonable.

But we must not pull the rug out from under existing pain patients without identifying an achievable fall-back strategy for managing pain and weaning them off opioids.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Your veterans need your help

Every weekday at 7 a.m., the Disabled American Veterans van departs from the parking lot on Marine Drive just west of Burger King, with veterans who have medical appointments at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Portland.

Our local veterans depend on this transportation for medical treatment they otherwise would not receive. Many are treated for life-threatening conditions, and have no other way to see their physicians.

This crucial service is provided by volunteer drivers who deliver the veterans to their appointments, have breakfast and lunch (on the VA) or read in a drivers' lounge, then return to Astoria that afternoon when all the veterans have received their treatments.

We need additional drivers to continue providing uninterrupted service to our veterans. You can make a difference by ensuring our veterans receive the medical treatment they deserve.

Do you have one or two days a month to help serve our veterans? Find out how you can help by calling Dick Lang at 503-298-8757 or sending an email to AstoriaDAVvan@charter.net

The commitment to be a driver will earn you a free physical examination, breakfast and lunch in the veterans' cafeteria on the days you drive, and a wonderful feeling of satisfaction you get by helping our veterans. Please, join us now.

DICK LANG  
Astoria

### Wev is the best choice for District 3

Clatsop County needs a District 3 commissioner with fresh ideas and actual experience in leading change. That person is Pam Wev. Her life experiences and her background in planning and business development make her a perfect fit.

Pam has worked with dozens of governments to help them prepare for and capitalize on growth. She is from a Coast Guard family, giving her insight into what it takes to support one of our largest economic drivers. She has raised a family as a single mother, showing her the value of work, discipline and empathy for those struggling to make it from today to tomorrow.

Pam is focused on the same community concerns we all share — sustainability of our forests, fisheries and farms; affordable housing; and transportation and emergency response

infrastructure to cope with geologic or weather events. She knows those same transportation upgrades are needed to move our people, tourists and port shipments.

The biggest reason I am voting for Pam is her character. In a time when politicians will say anything to get elected, Pam stands out for her honesty, fairness and moral character. Pam Wev has my vote for District 3 commissioner, and I ask you to vote for her, too.

BRYAN KIDDER  
Astoria

### Vote Orr for House District 32

I am delighted to endorse John Orr for Oregon House District 32. The progressive values of the North Oregon Coast could not be better served.

John is clearly ready to take on issues that are important to the district. He'll demand economic and social equity. He'll champion our small businesses. And, he'll be a strong voice to protect our irreplaceable environment.

John has the discernment and tenacity to influence the state government to respect the needs of his constituents. With his attention to detail, he's ready to create and improve complex legislation from the day he takes office.

I've known John for several years, and I've often enjoyed his thoughtful insights. He has a brilliant mind, matched with genuine curiosity and respect for the views of others.

This is an opportunity to elect an engaged and accessible representative. Thank you, John, for offering your service.

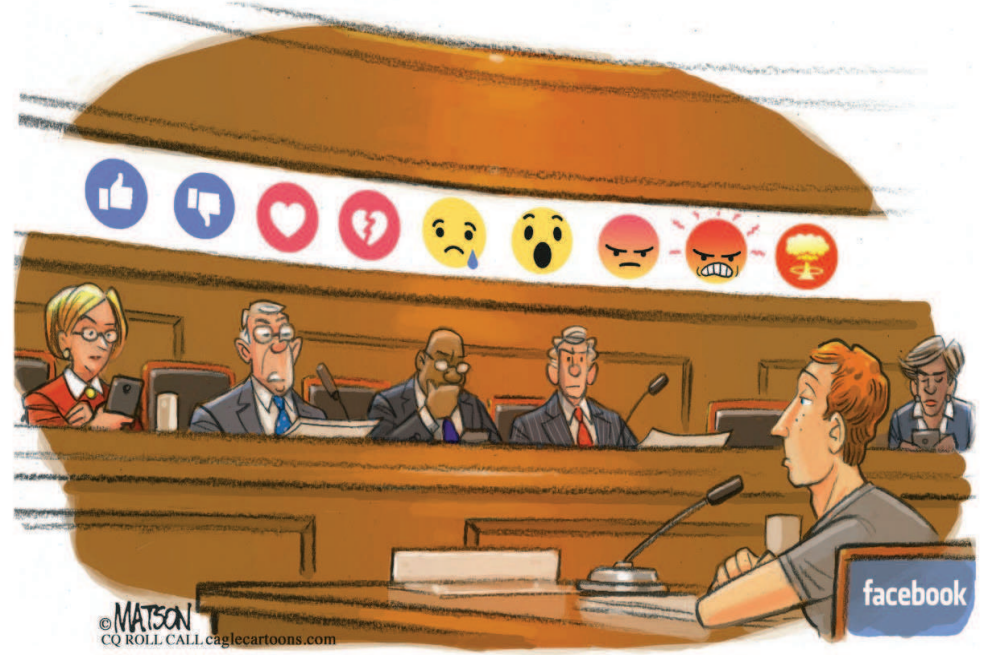
PETER HUHTALA  
Former Clatsop County Commissioner  
Tigard

### Commissioners got it right

The Daily Astorian's recent headline, "County mistakenly exits forest committee" (April 6) suggests that the commission bungled their decision not to pay dues to the Council of Forest Trust Land Counties (CFTLC) because they were not fully informed they could lose their voice on the Forest Trust Land Advisory Committee (FTLAC).

But there was no mistake made by the commission. A more accurate headline would have read, "Commissioners take a brave stand for balanced forest management."

Chairman Scott Lee's explanation makes it clear that the commission's status with the FTLAC was insignificant in their decision, because that body has not represented our county's balanced forest management position



"OUR LIKES AND DISLIKES OF YOUR RESPONSES MUST NOT BE SHARED, SOLD, OR STOLEN, MR. ZUCKERBERG."

for years, and because the FTLAC won't be advising the Board of Forestry until the Linn County lawsuit is resolved, which could take several years.

That renders irrelevant the hackneyed argument made by Tillamook County Commissioner David Yamamoto the night of the vote. He stated repeatedly that our county might lose its "seat at the table." Why was he there, anyway?

The reason could be that our commission's strong stands on the Linn County suit, and not paying the CFTLC dues, call into question the validity of the lawsuit — which, if successful, would most likely result in increased timber harvest in state forests, a position advocated by Yamamoto and fellow commissioner Tim Josi, who has long chaired the FTLAC, where he has pushed his personal agenda of more clear-cutting of older forests before endangered species inhabit them.

ROGER DORBAND  
Astoria

### Inpatient care needed for mental illness

Once again the North Coast experiences "anger, frustration and uncertainty," at the actions of a seriously mentally disturbed individual, Noel Moor ("Behind a tragedy in Warrenton, an uncertain diagnosis," The Daily Astorian, April 6). Ms. Moor is presently incarcerated.

She is not alone, as the sheriff indicates that

the number of mental health persons is one of the reasons why we need a bigger and better jail. One does not need to be a psychiatrist, however, to understand that confinement to a jail is wholly inappropriate for persons with extensive mental health issues.

Clatsop County is the seventh-highest income producer among the 32 counties of Oregon. Perhaps it's time for the Lutheran and Catholic hospitals to join with the county in soliciting funds to establish an inpatient care facility for those with severe mental illness. It appears that this is a basic Christian and human need.

GEORGE McCARTIN  
Candidate, Clatsop County commissioner,  
District 1  
Astoria

### Vote Orr for state representative

John Orr is my choice for Oregon House District 32. He is forward-thinking and independent from any special interest groups. John has passion and will fight for us, the citizens of District 32. People from outside our district have worked at getting his opponents to run. These are people trying to get someone they want in Salem. We need to decide who represents us, and not special interest groups. Please join me in voting for John Orr in the primary. We need a strong Democrat to represent us, the people of District 32.

JAN COUGHLIN  
Astoria