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**KATHRYN B. BROWN**  
Publisher  
**JENNINE PERKINSON**  
Advertising Director

**DANIEL WATTENBURGER**  
Managing Editor  
**TIM TRAINOR**  
Opinion Page Editor

**OUR VIEW**

# ‘Silent mass disaster’ demands attention

Viewers of television crime shows get the impression that discovery of human remains sets off an intense response, complete with FBI facial reconstruction experts, swift and accurate DNA tests and vast electronic databases that match subtle clues with lists of possible victims.

Reality is more like the situation the EO Media Group reported last in Wahkiakum County, Washington. The piece, titled “Mystery on the Columbia” ran in Friday’s *East Oregonian*.

A body is discovered and local officials do what they can — with few resources — to determine whether a crime has been committed and who the person is. Ultimately, in a large nation, each new set of unidentified remains joins a large number of others and is gradually forgotten.

“The facts are sobering,” Nancy Ritter of the National Institute of Justice said in the *NIJ Journal*. “On any given day, there are as many as 100,000 active missing persons cases in the United States. Every year, tens of thousands of people vanish under

suspicious circumstances. Viewed over a 20-year period, the number of missing persons can be estimated in the hundreds of thousands.”

Some of these missing, which Ritter describes as “the nation’s silent mass disaster,” are missing because they are dead. More than 40,000 sets of human remains await identification in evidence rooms. Only 6,000 of these are entered in the FBI’s National Crime Information Center database. Many remains are buried without even a DNA sample being obtained.

The NIJ makes a variety of good suggestions. All require federal or state funding. They include providing free tests of unidentified remains and collecting reference samples from the families of the missing.

It’s shocking to learn the scale of this problem. An advanced nation should make the methodical science available to us a reality, not a TV gimmick. We can be certain murders are occurring that are never discovered, much less solved.

**“On any given day, there are as many as 100,000 active missing persons cases in the United States.”**

— Nancy Ritter, National Institute of Justice

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

## Culture corner

### Revisit popular NBC political series

Calling all binge watchers.

“The West Wing” captivated viewers for seven seasons from 1999 to 2006 as President Josiah Bartlet (Martin Sheen) and his hard-driving staff faced foreign crises, internal strife and other issues in weekly adrenaline-filled episodes. The NBC series garnered three Golden Globes and 26 Emmy Awards and attracted 17 million viewers during early seasons.

Why bring up a show that went off the air 10 years ago?

A pop culture podcast, “The West Wing Weekly,” is giving the show second life. West Wing actor Josh Malina joins with co-host Hrishikesh



Hirway to serve as guides as they re-watch each episode and then talk about it on the air. Malina played White House deputy communications director Will Bailey on the series. Hirway is a singer, composer and host of “Song

Exploder,” a podcast where musicians reveal the origins and inner workings of their songs.

Malina and Hirway plan to discuss all 156 episodes of the political series, likely finishing sometime in 2019. Americans mired in the current contentious election campaign have an opportunity to escape to go back and

view politics (albeit a fictional version) through the lens of time.

If you need an excuse to re-watch “The West Wing,” this is it.

Find it at [www.thewestwingweekly.com](http://www.thewestwingweekly.com).

— Kathy Aney, senior reporter

**OTHER VIEWS**



## More damned emails

Following last week’s Republican calamity in Cleveland, the Democratic National Convention rolled into Philadelphia on Monday with big opportunities and big challenges.

Many Democrats came with enthusiasm, but also reservations.

Unlike the Republican Convention’s speaker lineup, which was backfilled with Donald Trump’s children because there were so few party heavyweights to anchor it, the Democratic Convention will have a litany of A-listers: The president, the first lady, Bernie Sanders and former President Bill Clinton among them.

These speakers will paint a vastly different picture of the country and its future than the unremittingly dark and dangerous one portrayed by the Republicans.

There will also likely be less acrimony in Philadelphia, as the Democrats review the failed stagecraft of Cleveland and work hard not to replicate it.

But, all is not roses for the Democrats.

The presumptive presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton, has a battered image — partly due to a concerted effort by Republicans to batter it, and partly the result of her own poor choices. Two-thirds of registered voters don’t believe that she’s honest and trustworthy, and trustworthiness is one of those attributes that tends to be difficult to quickly and easily alter.

Clinton’s honesty numbers are even worse than Trump’s, but not by much. They both have some unbelievable negatives. As *The New York Times* reported earlier this month:

“In a development not seen in any modern presidential contest, more than half of all voters hold unfavorable views of the two major party candidates and large majorities say neither is honest and trustworthy. Only half of voters say Mrs. Clinton is prepared to be president, while an astonishing two-thirds say that Mr. Trump is not ready for the job — including four in 10 Republicans.”

But, being about as bad as Trump is hardly a good thing. Trump is a horrible candidate who shouldn’t have a shot, but in this race he does. Although Clinton remains the favorite to win in November, the race is too close for comfort. There are paths to victory — uphill though they may be — for Trump to win.

(Just typing that sent shivers down my spine. The idea that a man who used a racist attack on a judge in one of his own cases might get to pick the next one — or even two or three — Supreme Court justices is in itself unfathomable. The fact that he’s even competitive makes me question the electoral competency of America.)

Too many voters find themselves in the worst possible position: They have a choice between a Republican of whom they are frightened and disgusted and a Democrat of whom they are leery and unenthused.

Last week Clinton had a chance to shake up the race with her vice-presidential pick,



**CHARLES BLOW**  
Comment

but instead she chose the safer route, choosing the Democratic centrist Tim Kaine.

Kaine has his virtues — he is solid and affable, a solid liberal from the crucial state of Virginia — but this is not the sort of pick that taps into the progressive populism sweeping the party or the expansive diversity that constitutes the party.

Kaine reinforces Clinton’s “steady hand” message, but that is a message, however valid and necessary, that’s completely devoid of sizzle.

Trump is campaigning on fear, change and winning, all intense and even seductive ideas,

even though his proposals are insular, unrealistic or hollow. “Steady” just doesn’t have the same emotional appeal. And although I hate to boil a historic election, and monumental policy challenges, down to emotions, I’ve been around long enough to know that this sort of visceral sensibility can swing elections.

The Democrats also have to deal with the resurgent idea of a primary process and party apparatus that favored Clinton and wasn’t completely fair to Sanders.

This was reignited in the conversation last week when WikiLeaks released nearly 20,000 internal emails from the Democratic National Committee in which some officers expressed antipathy and outright hostility to Sanders and his candidacy.

No matter whom one supported during the primaries, or even what party one aligns with, this should turn the stomach. This kind of collusion is precisely what is poisoning faith in our politics.

This reinforced the feeling of many that the system was rigged from the beginning.

CNN reported on Sunday that in the wake of the scandal, the tainted party chairwoman, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, agreed to step down from her role at the conclusion of the convention.

But the injury is already inflicted.

These leaks further damage an already damaged faith in the Democratic nominating process. In March, the Pew Research Center found:

“Forty two percent of Republican voters have a positive view of the primary process, compared with 30 percent of Democrats. The share of Democrats expressing a positive view of the primary process has declined 22 percentage points (from 52 percent) in February 2008. Republican views are little different than in 2000 or 2008.”

What are those Democratic voters supposed to do who don’t trust the candidate, the party or the process, even if they view The Donald as the Devil? This is one of the convention’s conundrums.

Charles M. Blow is *The New York Times*’s visual Op-Ed columnist.

**YOUR VIEWS**

### Inaugural Whisky Fest a success, will be back and even better

Congratulations to Doug Corey and Andy McAnally for bringing the Zach Brown concert to Pendleton.

So many people in town: all the motels and hotels booked to full capacity, all restaurants very, very busy, gas stations and food marts full of cars and people, fans filling the downtown streets and stores.

Even the Duck bus was in town with the fight song blaring from its speakers, which in turn caused Beaver fans to break out in their

fight song.

Fun was had by many. Out-of-town folks love coming to Round-Up Stadium for rodeo and music. Local groups were able to work and make money for their activities.

Could some things have been done better? Sure. When you put on a big event, you are always learning how to do things better. And these two fellows have already figured out how to make next year’s concert even better.

Congratulations, again, to Andy and Doug on a job well done.

Dean Fouquette Pendleton

**CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES**

**U.S. Senators**

**Ron Wyden**  
Washington office:  
221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20510  
202-224-5244  
La Grande office:  
541-962-7691

**Jeff Merkley**  
Washington office:  
313 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
202-224-3753  
Pendleton office:  
541-278-1129

**State Senator**

**Bill Hansell, District 29**  
900 Court St. NE, S-423  
Salem, OR 97301  
503-986-1729  
Sen.BillHansell@state.or.us

**State Representatives**

**Greg Barreto, District 58**  
900 Court St. NE, H-38  
Salem, OR 97301  
503-986-1458  
Rep.GregBarreto@state.or.us

**Greg Smith, District 57**  
900 Court St. NE, H-482  
Salem, OR 97301  
503-986-1457  
Rep.GregSmith@state.or.us

## Fund gun violence research

The (Medford) Mail Tribune

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown recently issued an executive order intended to strengthen existing state gun laws, and called on the Legislature to enact three new laws next session aimed at reducing gun violence. Gun rights groups say the measures won’t work; gun control supporters say they will.

Here’s the truth: Nobody knows. Nobody knows because badly needed research at the federal level has been suppressed for decades by Congress, which has blocked funding for gun violence research by the Centers for Disease Control. Starting in 1996, Congress prohibited any funding for CDC studies that would “advocate or promote gun control.” The public health agency, fearing its funding could be in jeopardy, ended all such research.

In 2013, after the Sandy Hook massacre in Newtown, Conn., President Obama issued an executive order directing the CDC to draw up a plan to thoroughly study gun violence and potential remedies. The CDC, with the help of the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council, convened a committee of experts that developed a potential research agenda. But Congress never approved any funding for research.

Now, Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, along with 22 fellow Democratic senators, is asking Senate leaders to allow the CDC to conduct the research.

None of that research needs to

infringe on anyone’s rights. What it just might do is settle some debates over gun statistics, so that at least we can all start the debate with the same set of facts.

For example, gun rights advocates are fond of claiming that gun owners successfully defend themselves with firearms far more often that is reported — 3 million times a year, according to one study. Another study says 500,000. Still another says 108,000. The CDC’s research agenda dryly notes “the variation in these numbers remains a controversy in the field.”

Clearly, more research is needed. While they’re at it, researchers could answer other basic questions:

- How many guns are there in the U.S.?
- How do criminals get guns?
- Does limiting magazine capacity work?
- Is there a relationship between gun ownership levels and crime levels?
- Do universal background checks work?

Gun rights supporters and gun control advocates may say they know the answers to these questions. They don’t. But they could, if the CDC were allowed to conduct the research necessary to answer these and other questions.

Unfortunately, the gun lobby and its congressional supporters steadfastly blocked that research — as though they are afraid of what research might reveal.

The Senate should choose science over rhetoric and fund gun-violence research.