

# The real face of homelessness

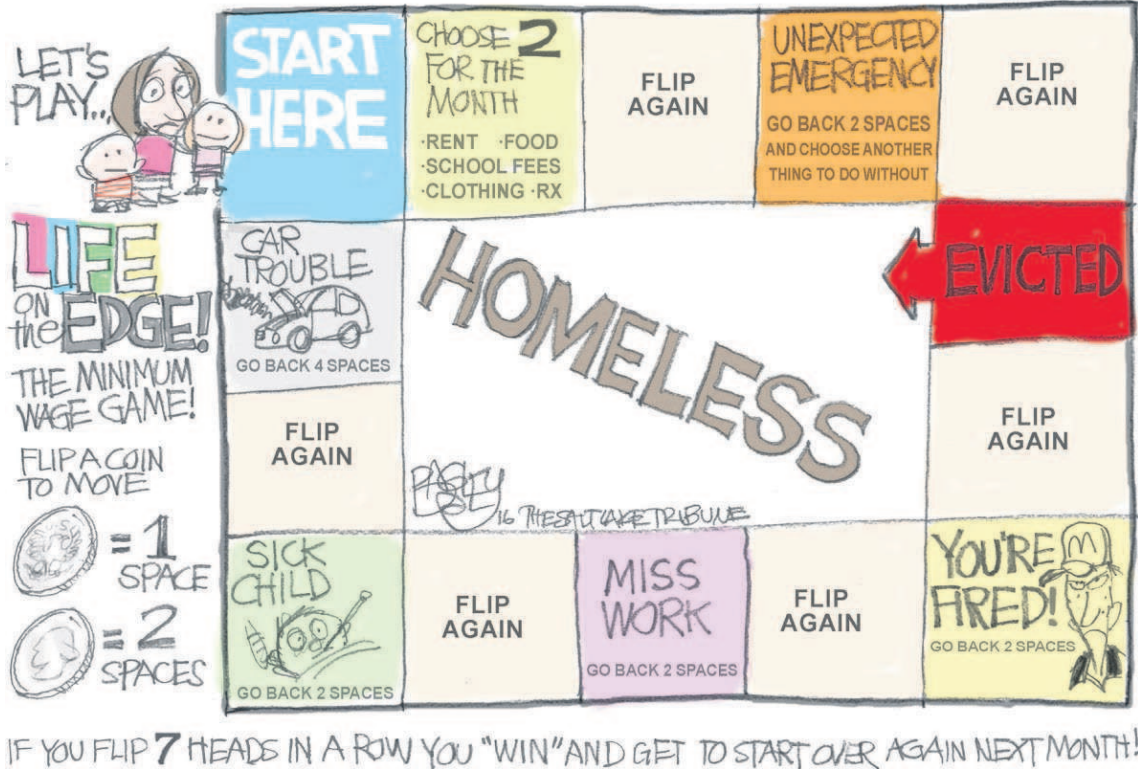
The (Eugene) Register-Guard, Dec. 4

The statistics in a new report were bad enough: 21,340 students in Oregon public schools were homeless in the last school year; 1,929 pre-kindergarten students were homeless; 524 students — about one out of every 10 — in the Bethel School District were homeless, 900 students in the Eugene School District, about one in 20, were homeless; 480 students in the Springfield School District were homeless, also about one out of 20.

But it was reporter Alisha Roemeling's story of one boy, Luke Perrin, age 7, that broke the hearts of some Register-Guard readers.

Luke and his father, Robert Perrin, had spent the night in some bushes behind a Walmart store, with only a blanket and a tarp for shelter. The father was faced with telling his son that he was going to have to leave his beloved McCormack Elementary School in west Eugene because they were catching a bus to Corvallis in hopes of getting space together in a shelter.

Stories like Luke's are a painful reminder of the faces behind the numbers. They're a reminder of the thousands of stories of heartbreaks those statistics represent. They're a reminder that homelessness remains a hidden problem for many — the classmates or the fellow employees who don't go home but to a shelter, if they're lucky, or to a car or a tent if they're not.



They're a reminder that thousands of children in Oregon are growing up without adequate shelter, food, clothing or security. And if the humanitarian aspects of this are not enough, well, consider the economic costs in the coming years and decades.

It's understandable that Oregonians are feeling donor fatigue after years of being asked to help people who lost jobs and homes during the recession.

The problem is, even a rising economic tide is not lifting all boats. While new jobs continue to be created in Lane County, not all are highly paid. Some of the jobs that went away during the recession aren't coming back, and not everyone has the skills or experience needed to land the new ones.

Wages have remained stagnant or have fallen in a number of industries, but living costs have not. Oregon's median family income

in 2015 was about 1.6 percent below 2008, while the median rent increased 9.8 percent during that period.

And the safety net for people like Robert Perrin has developed some gaping holes. The wait for public and multifamily housing programs can range from one to four years, depending on size and location. Some waiting lists, such as the one for one-bedroom apartments in the Eugene-

Springfield area, have been closed because waiting times are excessively long, says the Housing and Community Services Agency of Lane County.

Given all this, it's no surprise that nonprofit groups and social service agencies are being swamped by people needing shelter, including families with children and vulnerable teenagers who are on their own.

Spending to alleviate homelessness grew under the Obama administration, but not by enough to compensate for decades of neglect and cuts in spending on anti-poverty programs that began in the Reagan era, when the budget for public housing and rental assistance was cut in half, to about \$17.5 billion. The country went from having a surplus of 300,000 low-cost housing units, some of them admittedly substandard, in 1970 to a deficit of 3.3 million units by 1985, according to a report from the National Housing Institute. Federally funded job training and affordable child care programs also were wiped out during the 1980s, putting more pressure on the poor. It was during that period that homelessness exploded in America, with many of them Vietnam veterans, children and laid-off workers.

What is needed is recognition at the congressional level of a continuing national crisis in affordable housing. Voters need to insist on action. This isn't a Democratic or a Republican issue, it is an American issue.

## Quick takes

### Icy road troubles

Good grief. Driving in the snow is not that big of a deal if you don't drive like an idiot and respect it.

Tanner Remillard

Whoever doesn't respect Cabbage Hill and Ladd Canyon in the winter weather is a fool.

Paula Heinrich

The more, the hairier.

Jeff Petersen

I love the snow...just not the over scared snow drivers! DMV needs to teach a class for those that are scared to drive so that they aren't endangering others on the road.

Jill Reed

### Pendleton marijuana permits

I am so baffled as to why eastern Oregon communities are encouraging the continuation of the black market marijuana trade and missing out on the tax revenue.

Ariel Gummer

That's not a lot of money for permits and applications. Don't forget this is a very lucrative business, especially when there are only a couple of choices.

Warren G Molden

Pendleton Whisky is perfectly fine because it has "Pendleton" in the title, so, the solution is to call it "Pendleton Marijuana" or "Round-Up Marijuana."

Jeremy Rinehart

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim\_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

## Taiwan call only exposes inexperience

China Daily, Dec. 3

Friday's phone call between Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen and US President-elect Donald Trump, which broke the nearly four decades of U.S. diplomatic practice, came as a striking move but it does not bear the same importance as it seems to be.

For Trump, it exposed nothing but his and his transition team's inexperience in dealing with foreign affairs. If he could make the unusual action due to lack of proper understanding of Sino-U.S. relations and cross-Straits ties he will have to recognize the significance of prudently and appropriately addressing these sensitive issues after being inaugurated.

As U.S. president, Trump undoubtedly shoulders responsibility to safeguard the interests of his country, which includes a healthy relationship with China. To do that, he cannot afford to damage the one-China policy, which has been maintained by every U.S. administration since 1979 to serve as the political foundation for bilateral ties.

For Tsai, the phone call, a "petty gambit" as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called it, will bring nothing substantial but illusory pride.

If she managed to divert public outcry from her bad performance, she will not succeed. Tsai has to face the cold reality of a sagging approval rate and economic woes on the island after the media craze over the incident vanishes.

## It's not the Wild West anymore

I am getting tired of being shot at. The perpetrators may not realize they are shooting at me, but that only makes it worse.

People in the Wild West like to carry their guns with them when they venture into the outdoors. So far, so good. Problems arise when they get bored, pull out said guns and start plinking away at various objects. Shots from a rifle may travel more than a mile. The shooters cannot actually see that far.

Hiking in the national forest and hearing the BOOM of a high-powered rifle — one knows not where — is disconcerting, to say the least. In Arizona, it is illegal to shoot at trees, signs or outbuildings. Firearms must not be discharged within 150 yards of residences, buildings, campsites, occupied areas,

recreational areas or domestic livestock. Shooting across a road, trail, or watercourse (with or without water in it) is prohibited.

Someone who decides to get in a little target practice on the public lands may not know if there is a trail, road or recreation area close by. Some do not appear to care.

Target practice can harm more than people. The lead detritus from the bullets degrades the soil and the water, and plastic shotgun shells will never biodegrade. Shooting at glass (illegal) scatters shards far and wide. It is not uncommon (though also illegal) for people to drag old appliances into the desert to use as target practice. The riddled refrigerator is, of course, left there. Then there are those unspeakables who use

Native American rock art as targets.

During seasons of high fire danger, national forests are closed to recreational shooting because the spark from a gun may start a fire. Since 2009, as many as 81 fires have been started in Tonto National Forest in Arizona by target shooters. The Doce Fire in Prescott, Arizona, in 2013, started in a shooting area and burned over 7,000 acres.

Cacti are tempting targets, however prohibited. Will anyone forget the shooter of saguaro cactus who was crushed in 1982, when his multi-ton target fell on him? His demise was chronicled in the Austin Lounge Lizards song "Saguaro." In 2015, 2 percent of the Sonoran Desert National Monument outside of Phoenix was closed to target shooting due to damage to the environment, the cactus and the

endangered desert tortoise.

Carrying a gun in the backcountry is not the issue. The irresponsible use of said gun is. Gun owners do themselves no favors when hikers, bikers, equestrians, or ATV riders unwittingly become moving targets. Responsible gun users call the perpetrators of these abuses the "loony-toon" shooters. However, when a ban is put into place, they are all affected.

Spoiler alert: This is not the Wild West anymore. Rustlers may no longer lurk behind each boulder, but a group of birdwatchers may. And we are rather unhappy about being shot at.

Marjorie "Slim" Woodruff is a contributor to Writers on the Range, the opinion service of High Country News. She is an educator in Grand Canyon National Park.

### Look before you shoot.

## Make America gasp again

Many people voted for Donald Trump because they believed his promises that he would restore what they imagine were the good old days — the days when America had lots of traditional jobs mining coal and producing manufactured goods. They're going to be deeply disappointed: The shift away from blue-collar work is mainly about technological change, not globalization, and no amount of tweets and tax breaks will bring those jobs back.

But in other ways Trump can indeed restore the world of the 1970s. He can, for example, bring us back to the days when, all too often, the air wasn't safe to breathe. And he's made a good start by selecting Scott Pruitt, a harsh foe of pollution regulation, to head the Environmental Protection Agency. Make America gasp again!

Much of the commentary on the Pruitt appointment has focused on his denial of climate science and on the high likelihood that the incoming administration will undo the substantial progress President Barack Obama was beginning to make against climate change. And that is, in the long run, the big story.

After all, climate change is an existential threat in a way local pollution isn't, and the installation of the Trump team in power may mean that we have lost our last, best chance for a cooperative international effort to contain that threat.

Everyone who contributed to this outcome — very much, if I may say, including the journalists who elevated the fundamentally trivial issue of Hillary Clinton's

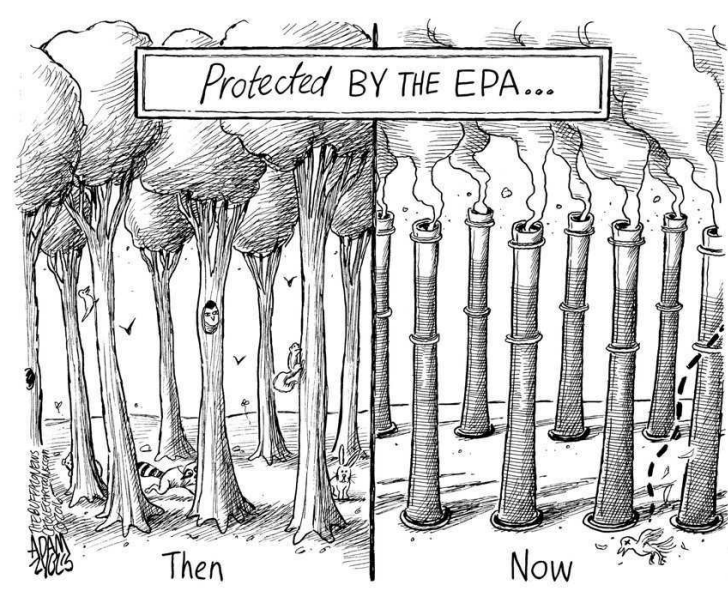
emails into the dominant theme of campaign reporting — bears part of the responsibility for what may end up being a civilization-ending event. No, that's not hyperbole.

But climate change is a slow-building, largely invisible threat, hard to explain or demonstrate to the general public — which is one reason lavishly funded climate deniers have been so successful at obfuscating the issue. So it's worth pointing out that most environmental regulation involves much more obvious, immediate, sometimes deadly threats. And much of that regulation may well be headed for oblivion.

Think about what America was like in 1970, the year the EPA was founded. It was still an industrial nation, with roughly a quarter of the workforce employed in manufacturing, often at relatively high wages, in large part because of a still-strong union movement. (Funny how Trumpist pledges to bring back the good old days never mention that part.)

It was also, however, a very polluted country. Choking smog was quite common in major cities; in the Los Angeles area, extreme pollution alerts, sometimes accompanied by warnings that even healthy adults should stay indoors and move as little as possible, were fairly common.

It's far better now — not perfect, but much better. These days, to experience the kind of pollution crisis that used to be all too frequent in Los Angeles or Houston, you have to go to places like Beijing or New Delhi. And the improvement in air



quality has had clear, measurable benefits. For example, we're seeing significant improvements in lung function among children in the Los Angeles area, clearly tied to reduced pollution.

The key point is that better air didn't happen by accident: It was a direct result of regulation — regulation that was bitterly opposed at every step by special interests that attacked the scientific evidence of harm from pollution, meanwhile insisting that limiting their emissions would kill jobs.

These special interests were, as you might guess, wrong about everything. The health benefits of cleaner air are overwhelmingly clear. Meanwhile, experience shows that a growing economy is perfectly consistent with an improving environment. In fact, reducing pollution brings large economic benefits once you take into account health care costs and the effects of lower pollution on productivity.

Meanwhile, claims of huge business costs from

environmental programs have been wrong time and time again. This may be no surprise when interest groups are trying to maintain their right to pollute. It turns out, however, that even the EPA itself has a history of overestimating the costs of its regulations.

So the looming degradation of environmental protection will be a bad thing on every level: bad for the economy as well as bad for our health. But don't expect rational arguments to that effect to sway the people who will soon be running the government.

The good news, sort of, is that some of the nasty environmental consequences of Trumpism will probably be visible — literally — quite soon. And when bad air days make a comeback, we'll know exactly whom to blame.

Paul Krugman joined is a New York Times columnist and professor of Economics and International Affairs at Princeton University.