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Homelessness: Society's Responsibility

Sleep Deprivation and the Brain

America Is Dying Younger

A Century of Socialism

Anxiety About Iran:

Protest and Draft Dodging

& more
The Pacific Sentinel is a monthly student-run magazine at PSU. We seek to uplift student voices and advocate on behalf of the marginalized. We analyze culture, politics, and daily life to continually take the dialogue further.

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February is here: the shortest month, Black History Month, the second month of the 2020 winter term, Valentine’s Day, and by now (writing as if it were the future) things have really changed since now (writing in the present on Jan 19, 2020).

It’s been a month since the military escalation with Iran, a month and a half since President Trump was impeached by the House, and at this point the Senate’s impeachment trial has been underway for two weeks. Going into the impeachment process, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell—double c double n double l, so many double consonants—promised to coordinate with the White House to ensure a swift trial that he estimated would be wrapped up by now.

Unfortunately, I can’t predict the future. If I could, I probably wouldn’t be writing this letter, I’d be up at Portland Meadows betting on some ponies with cool names like Jillian’s Chillin or Speedface McBurgermuncher III. Regardless, by now the Senate trial has either wrapped up, or it is turning a corner. Between the time of writing this and the time of publication the trial is going to change the political landscape significantly and the escalation of tensions with Iran will be in the back of Senators’ minds as they determine how best for our country, and their political careers, to proceed.

This issue contains many different explorations of important concepts. Paranoia about the possibility of a draft, a lackluster attempt to figure out why I’m worried about spoilers, the legacies of socialism in America, the state of bees, and a review of an album that matches the power a performer is able to project live through the comfort and confinement of a record.

In an interesting examination of various aspects of healthcare, we look at the misinformation surrounding needle exchanges and how they serve the community. We get reminded of the importance of sleep and the damage of sleep deprivation. We examine how homelessness is something we should all take responsibility for because it truly is on society as a whole to care about it. As the U.S. life expectancy gets shorter, we try to figure out what the root causes of it are. And to cap all of the conversations about healthcare and resources for the whole health of our fellow humans, we see a huge gap from the intention of rules to make healthcare better and the way those rules may actually be making healthcare worse in their implementation. Healthcare matters to everyone; and if any of these stories tell us anything about the state of the health and well-being of U.S. citizens, it’s that we really need to figure out how to fix it. What we have now isn’t working, too many people are falling through the cracks. Locally and nationally, when we try to seal those cracks we should probably check to make sure we aren’t creating enormous holes.

Party on,

Jake Johnson
Executive Editor
Misinformation and heated debates over needle exchange services in St. Johns

by Vivian Veidt

The assembly room of the St. Johns Community Center on January 13, 2019 is filled to capacity. Grumbling and impassioned conversation can be heard in the crowd as volunteers roll additional seats into the packed standing-room. Board members for the St. Johns Neighborhood Association claim they have never seen such a large attendance at a monthly general meeting as they implore the membership to be courteous and contain their emotions. The subject of so much attention is a controversial syringe exchange operated by Portland People’s Outreach Program (PPOP).

Syringe exchanges are part of a movement known as harm reduction. Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC), a national organization, defines the movement as "a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use." These strategies include individualizing experiences with drug use reduction initiatives, providing non-coercive and non-judgemental services, recognizing demographic and societal factors that make individuals vulnerable to drug-related harm, and providing clean supplies to reduce the public health impact of drug use. Syringe exchanges—services for injection-drug users to return used syringes and receive sterile supplies—are exempt from laws prohibiting the distribution of drug paraphernalia. ORS 475.525(3) excludes hypodermic needles and syringes from the definition of drug paraphernalia; in June of 2019, lawmakers passed House Bill 2257 which not only defines substance use as a chronic disorder, but also exempts all supplies provided by syringe service programs from the definition of drug paraphernalia.

PPOP has been operating weekend syringe exchanges in Portland since 2015. The service provides "need-based" access to hypodermic needles, cotton balls, tourniquets, alcohol pads, and small metal pots used for heating substances—called "cookers." Need-based syringe exchanges operate on a model that provides supplies based on a client’s needs without a requirement to return used supplies for service. PPOP also provides access to naloxone, a powerful opioid overdose reversal drug recommended by U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams. PPOP has operated a mobile outreach program since the organization was evicted from its building in St. Johns in 2018.

The meeting of the neighborhood association continues, acknowledging the controversy that has filled its seats for the first time. Chairperson Marisa Peter asks guest Robert King—Senior Public Safety Advisor to the Office of Mayor Wheeler—for an opinion on the legality of syringe exchange services by referencing House Bill 2257, which became law in 2019 and exempts all supplies provided by syringe service programs from the definition of drug paraphernalia.

Public health researcher and PPOP volunteer Justine Pope takes the stage with PPOP volunteer Jennifer Phillips to deliver a slideshow overview of harm reduction and PPOP’s syringe exchange program. The atmosphere becomes overtly hostile when Chairperson Peter describes the time allotment for PPOP’s presentation as five minutes shorter than the agenda states. The conflict plays out with Chairperson Peter redacting her claim and deferring to the agenda, but the tension of the moment is never repaired. Resuming her presentation, Pope alleges that the St.
Johns Neighborhood Association has made "persistent legal threats toward [PPOP] community service providers," perpetuated misinformation about PPOP, and that "board members have personally attacked PPOP," further claiming that the organization is not trustworthy to handle queries on behalf of the syringe exchange.

Conflict between parties irrevocably escalates when presenters Pope and Phillips continue speaking after Chairperson Peter calls for an end to the presentation to adhere to the printed agenda. In defense of her action, Pope claims that she did not consent to the allotted time restraints prior to the assembly. The meeting transitions slowly to its open question period, during which two audience members request the completion of the interrupted presentation, at which time Pope and Phillips resume their presentation to vocal opposition from the audience. One community member, Eric, advocated for PPOP and described the ways the program helped them seek addiction treatment. "If it wasn't for them," he said, "I probably wouldn't be here to tell you guys about this now."

Another audience member asked how distributing meth pipes and cocaine inhalation devices reduces harm to the neighborhood, but was not satisfied by Pope's answer that it promotes safer ways to use drugs than injection. Pope quickly moved to the next question.

"I don't deny what you're doing as a service is helping the people that you're servicing," offered Cory Gates, a 13-year resident of St. Johns. He explained that the community’s anger comes from stress over weekly car break-ins and littered needles by the bike path. "I can’t walk my children through that area," Gates complained before directing a question to King: "What is the city doing to help us...resolve this issue?" King suggested continuing the conversation in a follow up meeting that includes the Commander of Portland Police Bureau’s North Precinct.

Afterwards, Gates said he was not satisfied with King's answer but is prepared to work with the city. Gates claims that he did not learn more about PPOP from the accompanying slideshow, adding "I couldn't see it," nor did it quell his concern that their needs-based model is responsible for the uptick in littered needles. "If it's illegal, put it in an environment that is creating health services." He would, however, consider a supervised injection site: "It's got to be for the social welfare of the community and not putting the community at risk." Supervised injection sites are controversial programs that provide specially-trained personnel, including nurses, to monitor injection of illegal drugs. They operate in Canada, Switzerland, and eight other countries, but there are no legal supervised injection sites in the United States—yet. The Trump administration took a nonprofit in Philadelphia to court over their city-backed plan to open an injection site. While the judge is still deciding, California legislators are working on a bill and other states are interested.

The general meeting continues with its treasury report as the crowd leaves the main assembly to continue the conversation about PPOP in the adjacent hallways. Advocates and opposition to the syringe exchange program compete for attention as interested and unsatisfied community members filter out of the building with questions. Despite alleged legal threats and harassment, PPOP continues to operate as normal, but the future of the programs is uncertain as the departing audience.

Additional reporting by Margo Craig

Above: Robert King, Senior Public Safety Advisor to Mayor Ted Wheeler, erroneously describes PPOP as "advocates of heroin and methamphetamine use."

Opposite page: Public health researcher and PPOP volunteer Justine Pope addresses a hostile audience.

Bottom left: A threat made against patrons of PPOP through the PPOP website in January, 2019.

Bottom right: A resident voices concern about hypodermic needles found in the St. Johns neighborhood.

Photographs by Vivian Veidt

Additional reporting by Margo Craig
The Killing of Soleimani

Around 1 a.m. on January 3, 2019, tensions between the United States and Iran intensified when President Donald Trump ordered a U.S. drone strike that killed the leader of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force, Major General Qasem Soleimani. Soleimani is widely considered the second most powerful person and most powerful military figure in Iran. A 2013 New Yorker article reported that one former officer from the CIA referred to Soleimani as being the "most powerful operative in the Middle East [in 2013]." Despite the frequency of U.S. drone strikes, this attack was unusual because the U.S. does not normally strike Iranian targets. The strike took place at Baghdad International Airport in Iraq. President Trump and his defense secretary have defended the killing of Soleimani because they believe he was plotting an imminent attack on Americans, American bases, and American embassies in the near future.

Soleimani and support from Iran have been critically important in the fight against ISIS. Some Iraqis fear that Soleimani's death will create an opportunity for ISIS, or another insurgent group like it, to rise to power.

Abbas Kadhim is the director of the Atlantic Council's Iraq Initiative. The Atlantic reported that Kadhim explained why the killing of Soleimani is sparking outrage: "It's one thing to kill someone who is considered a terrorist by everyone, including the host country... It's another thing to kill someone who is designated as a terrorist by the U.S. but not by the host country—Iraq, in this case."

The U.S. is not currently at war with Iran. Politico reported that since 2014, the U.S. has been in Iraq training Iraqi troops to fight ISIS. Part of the agreement with Iraq to do this involved a specific request to not target Iran within Iraq. Politico also pointed out that Iraqi cooperation was crucial to having a foothold in the region in order to not only fight ISIS in Iraq, but in Syria as well. In the strike that killed Soleimani, an Iraqi militia leader was killed as well. Because of the strike, Iraq's parliament has asked the U.S. to withdraw its troops from the country.

President Trump and his defense secretary have defended the killing of Soleimani because they believe he was plotting an imminent attack on Americans, American bases, and American embassies in the near future.

The BBC reported that later that day, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told Fox News that "We do not seek war with Iran but we will not stand by and see American lives put at risk."

Typically a staunch supporter of the president, Fox's Tucker Carlson criticized the killing of Soleimani as being a move that does little to benefit safety and stability. Carlson also emphasized how, whether or not Soleimani was a "bad guy," killing him is complicated and a war with Iran would not be easy to end. Carlson referenced the nearly 19 years spent in a war in Afghanistan.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei vowed to avenge Soleimani's death. In response to the U.S. strike, and Iran's promises to respond, President Trump threatened to destroy dozens of Iranian cultural sites in a tweet.

"Iran has been nothing but problems for many years. Let this serve as a WARNING that if Iran strikes any American, or American assets, we have....[SIC]" Trump tweeted. "I targeted 52 Iranian sites (representing the 52 American hostages taken by Iran many years ago [1979]), some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture, and those targets, and Iran itself, WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD. The USA wants no more threats.[SIC]"

NPR reported that The Hague Convention prohibits "any act of hostility" against such sites, and that doing so would be illegal. Targeting cultural sites is a war crime. According to
PolitiFact, deliberately destroying cultural property not only violates international law, but also U.S. laws of war.

U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper responded to President Trump's threat and criticism by saying that the U.S. would not target Iranian cultural sites and that the U.S. would “follow the laws of armed conflict.”

**Portland quickly reacts with anti-war rally**

In Portland, and throughout the U.S., the early morning killing of Soleimani took place while we were experiencing the afternoon of January 2. Democratic Socialists of America's Portland chapter quickly organized a protest for the following day to send a clear message: “No War With Iran.” The rally was held in conjunction with nationwide protests planned by the Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (A.N.S.W.E.R.) Coalition for the following day, Saturday, January 4.

Candy Luisa Herrera of Portland DSA said the nationwide protests are being held because “We [the U.S.] killed Soleimani.” Herrera said, “A.N.S.W.E.R. Coalition's...day of action is tomorrow, we're doing ours a bit early. But it's part of a nationally coordinated action to demonstrate that people just will not tolerate another war.” The killing of Soleimani “is an extremely aggressive move to make internationally,” Herrera said. “And so we felt the need to pull something together last-minute just to demonstrate that we're against war.”

As Portlanders gathered in Terry Schrunk Plaza, they held many protest signs against war and U.S. imperialism. Politicians, political organizers, peace activists, people born in Iraq and Iran, and military veterans gave speeches about why they felt the need to speak out against the possibility of war with Iran. The crowd of 250 performed call-and-response chants including: “No war with Iran,” “No war but class war,” “Not another nickel, not another dime, no more money for U.S. war crimes,” and “Hey hey, ho ho, this racist war has got to go.”

Many of the speakers highlighted how defense contractors' and military equipment manufacturers' stocks rose after news of the killing of the Iranian general. They talked about how oil prices are rising. They talked about the false promises and misinformation that has led to a nearly 20-year war in the Middle East with no end in sight. They also talked about who would be fighting the war: not the upper-class politicians that declare war or their children, but middle and lower class young adults. Speakers also emphasized that the Iranian people have that in common with Americans.

A veteran who served as a medic in the Vietnam War said that there wasn’t a single day during that war that didn’t involve the U.S. committing atrocities. The veteran said he zippered up the body of a U.S. soldier who shot himself in the head and witnessed another do the same. “We knew the war was a lie,” the veteran said. “Lying is the most powerful weapon in war. The reason we are in Iran right now, is because American corporations can't make a killing off peace.” The veteran expressed a lot of concern about the way that war affects the people who fight it. “22 American veterans commit suicide every day,” he said. “This is madness, we know it’s madness.”

In retaliation for the strike that killed Soleimani, Iran launched missiles at two U.S.-Iraqi military bases—no one was seriously injured in the attacks. During the aftermath that included Iran’s retaliation, a Ukrainian passenger plane was shot down by the Iranian military, resulting in the deaths of 176 people from all over the world, including Canada. In response to the information that Iran was responsible for the downing of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752, many Iranians throughout Iran, including thousands of people in Tehran, protested against their government beginning on January 11 for accidentally downing the aircraft.

A surprising moment at Portland's peaceful anti-war rally came when one of the call-and-response chants was spearheaded by Philip Wolfe. Wolfe is a candidate for Portland City Council and is deaf. Wolfe used his voice to energetically lead the crowd of Portlanders with powerful chant to “Stop the war.”

(continued on next page)
Marena Riggan: Arabic and Middle East Studies major at Portland State University
Riggan is not pictured in the photo above.

"I've grown up my entire life with the U.S. involved in some military conflicts in the world, and especially in the Middle East. Our lack of understanding over these conflicts compels me, in part, to study what I study. I'm an Arabic and Middle East Studies major. I'm tired of being a witness to U.S. atrocities in the world. I'm tired of being a witness to the hypocritical nature of how the U.S. acts in the world. I'm tired of the U.S. committing war crimes. I'm tired of the U.S. violating international law, bluntly...It breaks my heart to see history rhyming once again.

"What I enjoy seeing from this is the collective nature and knowing that I'm not the only person who is deeply bothered by this. I was talking with a friend from Kuwait earlier today. They have U.S. bases stationed in Kuwait, and there's a general worry that if the U.S. decides to use these bases for strategic military purposes, that Kuwait could, potentially, become a target. I think..." Riggan repeated the message in Arabic she said to her friend earlier, and then translated it back in English, "I'm sorry from my heart, we do not have the right. I want people in the Middle East to have justice, to have rights."

"How many times can a person watch a country—any country but especially their own—destroy the world for its own dominion. Knowledgeable that they themselves can do almost nothing but shake their heads and be arrested in the streets."
Mitch Green: Army Veteran of the Afghanistan War, Portland DSA

“So what right do I have to stand here and take the moral high ground? After all, I too remember cheering on the Iraq invasion as I went along with the nationalist fervor of that time,” Green said. “I went to Afghanistan as an Army soldier in 2004, but I came home a different person. Having witnessed firsthand the human cost of war changed me and it left me personally scarred—and many others suffered a far worse fate than I did. Incidentally for me, I had a strong network of support amongst family and friends to get through the roughest of those first few years; and what ultimately helped me heal and galvanized my anti-war position was realizing that the horrors of war were a result of a system that imposes violence internationally in support of the material objectives of the owners of capital. We see the sons and daughters of the working class as expendable, as simply line items on their profit or loss statements—no different than any other input into the production process of the war machine.

“For all the malnourished children I met in Afghanistan,” Green continued. “for all the maimed bodies I encountered, for all my friends who suffered physically and emotionally as a result of their combat experiences, who lost their health and welfare to drug addiction resulting from their PTSD, and for all those who didn’t even come home, I say this: all of it was totally unnecessary. It was all based upon a lie. It was only in the service of perpetuating an endless war.”

Green also emphasized the human and financial cost of the wars we are currently engaged in and cited data that can be found in a Brown University study, the Costs of War Project. “While the wars in the Middle East are objectionable and intolerable on a moral basis alone, it still warrants some context in terms of the cost of this war, the wasted lives, the lost futures, and the trillions of dollars spent,” Green said. “Okay, so here are some facts—I’m an economist. Over 801,000 people have died due to direct violence—and many multiples of that due to indirect violence—in this global war on terror. Over 335,000 civilians have been killed as a result of the fighting. There are over 21,000,000 refugees or displaced persons. And the U.S. price tag for this, so far, is 6.4 trillion dollars—and they say we can’t afford nice things, right? So these figures should rattle the bones of any good person. This is the cost of war today and there is no end in sight.

Green closed by emphasizing the length of the war and the misleading sentiments that lead troops and the public to believe the war will end. “Despite the self-awareness among the military leadership themselves that the war was a failure and unwinnable, the popular narrative remained that we have to continue and we are making gains ever so incrementally,” Green said. “So we’ve heard this from three presidencies now, that victory is just around the corner. And we have this maintenance of the lie that the occupation in the Middle East is something that can be won, as if it has any practical meaning for working class people here and abroad. So I say enough is enough.

“To wrap it up I say to you as a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, [leads chant:] ‘No war in Iran. Not in my name. Shut it all down and bring them all home.’ So if you’re a veteran and you share my views, I say to you: you are not alone and please join us.”
"I hope [people] become more active in political organizations, organizations like Vets for Peace, like Code Pink, DSA Portland," Herrera said in an interview. "I'm active with Hands Off Venezuela, which does a lot of political education in terms of correcting the corporate narrative when it comes to U.S. international policy, particularly towards Venezuela. Iran is another one of the countries that have been hit hard by U.S. sanctions that are causing starvation and a dearth of medical supplies, that type of thing."

"No war for oil. Like how many times are we gonna say that?" Herrera said. "I mean, how many times are we going to apply that to different situations. I think the fact that a Republican president did this will hopefully give more strength to the anti-war movement in the United States. When a Democrat does it, you know, liberals seem to think it's okay. It's really not. Doesn't matter who does it. If anything, it's indicative of the mutual interests of two-party rule. But hopefully, people get involved for anti-war activism. Because we have a stake in all this, right? There's not rich people sending their kids, right? It's poor people dying in these wars that rich people start."

Olivia Katbi Smith: co-chair of Portland DSA

(above) Smith encouraged anyone who works in industries that support the war or promote pro-war narratives emanating from the White House to go on strike.

"What did we see last night after the assassination of the Iranian general in Iraq?" Katbi-Smith asked. "We saw Raytheon stocks go up—Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman [defense contractors]. Oil is at an 8-month high. Police in cities like Los Angeles and New York are upping the security state to quote "ward off terrorism." This is by design. This is not about democracy or freedom. This is not about protecting the Iraqi people, the Iranian people, or even the American people. This is about money and power.

"A saying we have on the left is 'no war but class war,'" Katbi-Smith continued. "What do we mean by that? We mean no war for oil. We mean no violence for profit. We mean no war but the war we are forced to wage to take back what is ours from the ruling class. Military wars—like the one we are here to protest against—are waged by the ruling class, but they are fought by the working class. Military recruiters recruit poor kids; they prey on working class kids, increasingly immigrant kids. Kids who have more in common with the people who they are sent to kill than with the monsters who are sending them there."
"Happy New Year to all my fellow Portlanders," Abadi said. "It's a somber New Year immediately. It's a shame and a travesty that we have to come together in a new year full of hope for a new people-oriented politics to emerge on the American political scene, to instead have to wrestle against the dread of a new front of war that is appearing to open right before our eyes...I've grown up in Portland from a young age. I'm now in my early 30s, and I'm a member of the local chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America. I serve on the steering committee.

I was born in Baghdad, Iraq. A country that has for the last three decades been victim to the foreign policy mire of the reactionary cynical neoconservative movement in the United States, which has been aided and abetted at every turn by feeble, cowardly neoliberal politicians. We are gathered here today in opposition to, not only Donald Trump's cynical bed for war, but the entire trajectory of neoconservative politics.

"Donald Trump is a dangerous president, desperate to secure a victory in 2020 by making himself a wartime president this year. This cynicism is nothing new, however. There hasn't been a president in the last 30 years who hasn't engaged in this type of dangerous political theater whether it was launching cruise missiles into Iraq in the late 90s by Bill Clinton, or the invasion of Iraq in 2003 or the troop surges in Afghanistan under Obama. This reckless, dangerous escalation culminating in the assassination of the Iranian general in Baghdad this last Thursday, risks not only more danger for Iraq and the Iraqi people, but for all neighboring countries.

"It is foreseeable and possible for this to escalate in a total state of war in the Middle East. This would not serve the express demands of the Iraqi people who protest against their government at great cost...It instead risks further conflagration, instability, and danger for all who call Iraq and the greater Middle East home. I am confident that Iraqis desperately want Iranian influence totally out of their nation so that they may have a sense of sovereignty and confidence in their state...The Iraqi people deserve better than to have their nation which has been embroiled in three decades of war, to continue to be used as a proxy battleground for the interests of everyone else besides the common interest of Iraqi people.

"Iraqis want their national resources to be used to build their country, to build institutions to serve the people, to regain guarantees with their life, liberty, and dignity. The Iraqi people are sick to death of the cowards who serve in the halls of power who engage in wild con'vism, nepotism, and theft. They are tired of the job of a sectarian government propped up by the United States. They are tired of Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, trying to hedge to their interests against the sovereignty of their nation. Starting a war with Iran and turning Iraq into a battleground to be sacrificed in a proxy conflict is an unimaginable disaster. And we Americans must oppose this absolutely.

"Please contact your representatives and demand they take immediate action to de-escalate and to press instead for a full bore diplomatic de-escalation. No one benefits from escalated conflict besides the military industrial complex, the global 1%, right-wing interests in Israel, and all the narrow interests of various armageddon factions. Stand with the people of Iraq, Iran, the Middle East and the United States and the world by opposing this bid for war.

"Refuse the status quo and do not let the days go by without speaking up about these issues. Keep the pressure up. Give a chance to a new world order where the interests of the people reign supreme over and above the interests of private elites...Fight the class war."
Sahar Yarjani Muranovic: Born in Tehran, Iran, Executive Director of the Oregon Chapter of the National Organization for Women, member of David Douglas School Board, Member of Portland DSA

“I was born in Tehran. And that’s actually where my parents are right now. So it’s a heavy time right now and I wanted to give you all a little bit of background to everything.

So up until the 1950s, Iranians saw the U.S. as a symbol of freedom in the world. All of that changed with the 1953 Iranian coup and the overthrow of the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossaddegh. At the time, Iran's oil reserves were under the control of the Anglo Saxon Iranian oil company. Mossaddegh tried to limit the IOC's (international oil companies) control over Iran's oil reserves, and the Iranian parliament voted to nationalize and nationalize the Iranian oil industry. In response to their corporate representatives being expelled from the country, the United Kingdom joined forces with the U.S. and the CIA to remove Mosaddegh from power and place a monarch, the last shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, into power. Pahlavi relied heavily on the support of the United States during his rule. This coup was the first covert action by the United States government to overthrow a foreign government during a time of peace.

The lesson of the coup for U.S. policymakers was that unfavorable foreign governments could simply be replaced with dictators more conducive to U.S. interests.

The 1953 Iranian coup served as a model to carry out similar CIA lead operations in Guatemala in 1954, and Chile in 1973. Pahlavi's 26-year rule ended with the 1975 Islamic Revolution. Given the United States prior history with Iran in the 1950s, some Iranian revolutionaries were enraged about the U.S. giving refuge to this monarch that they wanted to bring and place on trial. In retaliation, a group of students took the staff of the U.S. Embassy hostage in November of 1979 for 444 days. Since the revolution of 1979, Iran has been under some form of sanction or another imposed by the United States.

“My family and millions of other Iranian civilians have been bearing the brunt of these sanctions since before I was born. Sanctions contribute to the erasure of human rights and democracy in countries they are imposed on. They destroyed the working class and the communities that have been working for decades trying to improve human rights in the country.

And now, in a massive escalation to the sanctions, the United States has committed an illegal act of war on Iran by assassinating general Qassem Soleimani in Iraq, clearly a first step in launching a disastrous war. This is not about spreading democracy. This is about further destabilizing a resource-rich region for money and power. This administration has surrounded itself with the same people who took us to war in Iraq, wreaking havoc in the region and resulting in the death of millions of innocent civilians.

Brown University's Costs of War Project estimates the number of killed civilians at over 335,000.

These same individuals are now beating the drums of war against Iran and forming alliances with some of the biggest human rights violators in the Middle East and beyond to destabilize the region further. We can't afford to let this administration continue its warfare and interference into other countries... Too many democratically elected officials have been ousted; and far too many are suffering as we speak due to sanctions. Many more will die if this escalation continues. It's time to stand up to U.S. imperialism before it's too late.”
Albert Lee: Congressional candidate

Lee is running against Earl Blumenauer in the 2020 Democratic primary for the U.S. House of Representatives seat to represent Oregon's OR-3 district.

“I've studied political science, international relations, international law, international human rights law, but looking at this crowd around me tonight, I realize that it's pretty obvious that this was absolutely illegal,” Lee said. “This was murder. This was an assassination. This was a state-sponsored assassination by our government. We cannot stand for this.

“I served in the United States Army. I served at Arlington National Cemetery; and I buried a lot of soldiers from just wars, like World War II, and unjust wars, like Vietnam. And I've got to tell you, like our speakers before us have already said, it's not those at the top that suffer from these wars. It's those that are on the bottom. They're black and brown, the poor, the working class, we're the ones that suffer from these wars, here in this country and around the world.

“I come from a military family, my father served in the Army as well; and that's one of the reasons why I exist, because he was sent to Korea during the Cold War, during another part of our imperialist history. My wife, she served in the Army. She served in a combat hospital in Mosul, Iraq having to deal with all the injured soldiers that were there. Her father, before her, served in the Army. And I can tell you that all of us would not stand for this. None of us would stand for this.

“First point, this was illegal and we all know that. Second point, congress has abdicated its role and its responsibility in authorizing war. This has been going on for at least a couple of generations. Kowtowing to an executive branch, letting the executive branch tell us what is right and what is wrong. That is what the legislature is there for, its for the legislature to represent us...to tell the executive branch what to do, not the other way around. We need to repeal AUMF (Authorization for Use of Military Force), we need to rein in this imperial executive branch, and we need to have congressional leaders with backbones that are gonna actually do that.

“...War is not a solution. You know, they keep telling us that we need to do this preemptive war; that we need to go in there and get them before they get us. But war is never a solution. Because if it was, what about Iraq? What about Afghanistan? We've been stuck in those two places for over 20 years. What about Vietnam? War is never a solution. No war on Iran. We need to draw all of our troops back. We're in 76 countries around the world for no goddamn reason.

In 2017, Forbes reported that the U.S. had a military presence of 200,000 active-service troops in “at least 170 countries worldwide.” In 2017, Business Insider estimated the number of active-duty service men and women to be 1.3 million U.S. troops. In 2015, Politico reported that the U.S. had more than 800 military bases outside the U.S. in as many as 70 countries.

“It's called the defense department, not the offense department. We need to rein that defense department back in. We need to use it as a defense and a deterrent, not as an offensive war machine.”

Alyssa Pariah: Jobs With Justice

Pariah said that Jobs With Justice's message about the potential for war with Iran was simple but that they would keep saying it “until they stop with these disgusting imperialist games that they play.

“Empires crumble, and we want people to know that the working class here, the working class in Iraq, the working class in Iran, has everything in common. Stop beating the drums of war. From the top, they're gonna want to instill enough fear and hatred in us so that we go along with it. So that we feel alienated and afraid enough, that we go along with it.”

THE PACIFIC SENTINEL 13
Medicare Penalizes Hospitals for Readmissions

by Margo Craig

Illustrations by Ana Benitez Duarte

Medicare will continue to cut payments to hospitals with high rates of readmission as part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Hospital Readmission Reduction Program (HRRP), which pressures hospitals to reduce how many patients get readmitted within a month of hospitalization. Officials estimated that $17 billion of the $26 billion in Medicare costs came from potentially avoidable readmissions. Preventing those readmissions has become a cost-controlling priority. Furthermore, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) points to research that suggests some hospitals do better than others at preventing readmissions. The HRRP judges hospitals' performance against the national average. HRRP evaluates 3,129 general hospitals nationwide; 83% (2,583 hospitals) are being penalized. The average penalty this year is 0.71%, up from 0.57% last year according to a Kaiser Health News analysis. Medicare estimates that it will cost hospitals a total of $563 million over the course of 2020. 7 out of the 13 hospitals evaluated in the Portland metropolitan area are being penalized for high readmission rates despite having readmission rates that are beneath the national average.

The program, which began in 2012, is part of the Affordable Care Act’s (ACA) broad campaign to improve the quality of healthcare. Critics were concerned that the HRRP would create larger disparities from its impact on hospitals that see a higher proportion of disadvantaged populations. Another concern was that penalties to Medicare payments would create a perverse incentive for hospitals to avoid certain patients or influence how hospitals use resources. Some studies show an increase in mortality rates since HRRP went into effect, but other studies dispute the link.

Since its inception, HRRP has been a controversial health care policy. It is unclear whether the HRRP is improving patient safety and the quality of healthcare. Those in the hospital industry have argued that rates of readmission haven’t changed significantly despite a great deal of investment. But the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) says the program appears to be successful according to an analysis released in September: “On a risk-adjusted basis, it appears that readmissions have declined in 2010 to 2018 without causing a material increase in mortality.”

A recent study published this month in JAMA Cardiology suggests that readmission rates following treatment for a heart attack...
have in fact decreased, but that racial disparities persist and that readmission rates continue to be higher for Black patients, irrespective of whether hospitals had been penalized before or not. Martha J. Radford, M.D. (NYU Grossman School of Medicine, NY), wrote in an accompanying editorial that there is a need to “broaden the national quality measurement portfolio to better assess high-quality care, so that the U.S. healthcare system may reward hospitals that exemplify the best care U.S. medicine has to offer, rather than penalize hospitals for using resources that are likely to contribute to that care.” An outstanding question is whether readmission rates are a reliable indicator of healthcare quality when hospitals serve different population demographics. Whether the government financially penalizes or rewards hospitals for readmissions, critics say that using readmissions as a metric of healthcare quality would inherently influence decisions made by care providers.

The hospital system with the largest market share in the Portland metro area is Legacy Health. Legacy has had significantly lower profits in the last three years according to its financial filings. In its 2019 fiscal year, Legacy racked up over $1.3 billion in costs for Medicare and Medicaid patients—up from $710 million in 2013. Of the costs for 2019, the federal government reimbursed Legacy for just 70%. In 2017, according to the American Hospital Association, hospitals were reimbursed an average of 87% of Medicare costs.

The ACA’s Medicaid expansion and an aging population brought a greater influx of Medicare and Medicaid patients that go to hospitals for care. When the ACA went into effect, hospitals operating expenses started to outweigh revenue growth from patients. Hospitals across the country sought out ways to make more money to cover funding deficits. Many hospitals merged and expanded their networks to establish new sources of revenue. Many hospitals, including Legacy, have established their own provider systems for health insurance, but only a fraction of the provider organizations manage to turn a profit.

Is there a solution?

Some readmissions are inevitable, but CMS points to research that some hospitals do better than others at preventing readmissions. Research also showed that hospitals that serve more low-income individuals and major teaching hospitals are more likely to incur penalties. Safety-net hospitals, for example, are legally obligated to provide healthcare to individuals regardless of their insurance status and are more likely to admit patients that will suffer from complications after discharge given their socioeconomic status. In response, Congress mandated HRRP calculate readmission penalties that incorporate a socioeconomic adjustment based on each hospital’s share of inpatients who are dually qualified for Medicare and full Medicaid.

In 2016, Congress passed the 21st Century Cures Act; one provision was to overhaul HRRP so that calculations of readmission penalties compared hospitals that serve similar proportions of patients that are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid. Penalties that included the socioeconomic adjustment were applied for the first time in FY 2019.

A study published in JAMA found that the socioeconomic adjustment was associated with a significant shift in hospital penalties for excess readmissions. How penalties shifted varied from state to state according to each state’s Medicaid eligibility cutoffs. For example, penalties on California hospitals were reduced by at least $6.5 million whereas penalties on Florida hospitals increased by $2.5 million.

THE PACIFIC SENTINEL 15
A study released in November 2019 affirms past indicators that young Americans now have a lower life expectancy than previous generations, but that similar trends are not observed in economic contemporaries of the United States. The study implicates rises in drug overdose, suicide, and certain organ diseases as contributing factors, but also contains troubling data on infant mortality and health care in the U.S.

Of the 36 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations, the U.S. ranks 28th in life expectancy at birth, in the total population and has the fourth highest rate of infant mortality. Rates of infant mortality dramatically over-represent African-American, Hispanic, and First Nations Americans. Despite spending nearly double the percentage of GDP on healthcare than 10 economic contemporaries—including the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Japan—the U.S. reported lower health expectations and lower physician utilization and access to care. Increasing Life expectancy in the U.S. began to slow relative to contemporary economics in the 1980s before ultimately declining after 2014.

The decrease in U.S. life expectancy has been largely attributed to an increase in deaths among youth and middle-aged Americans. Highly represented in death statistics for these age demographics, particularly those under age 34, are hypertensive diseases and drug overdose correlating with the opioid crisis that began in 1991 and sharply increased since 2013. During the period from 1991 to 2017, the rate of fatal drug overdoses in the U.S. has increased by 386.5% across midlife age groups, aged 25-64, and 531.4% among those aged 25-34. Alcoholic liver disease increased by 40.6% over the same period.

Drug overdose, particularly involving opioids like fentanyl and heroin, has become a high public health priority worldwide, with six U.S. states, including Arizona and Massachusetts, declaring states of emergency. Harm reduction techniques have grown in popularity in nations most affected by the opioid crisis, including Canada, but have failed to gain widespread acceptance in the U.S. One technique includes the administration of naloxone, commonly known by the brand name Narcan, to reverse opioid overdose. The State of Oregon has established a Good Samaritan overdose law that prevents overdose victims and those who administer life-saving care, including giving naloxone or contacting emergency services, from prosecution for possessing drugs or drug paraphernalia, or for frequenting a location where drugs are used. The law also protects overdose victims and providers of life-saving care from arrest for outstanding warrants or probation and parole violations if evidence of their violations were obtained because they contacted emergency services to save a life.

According to OECD data on suicide among member nations, the U.S. ties with Finland in eighth place at a rate of 13.9 per 100,000 people. CDC reports indicate that youth suicide in the U.S. increased by 18% between 2014-2017, reversing the trend toward decreased rates observed between 2007-2014. There is some evidence that climate change may be a factor in the increase of youth suicide rates in the U.S.

Stanford economist Marshall Burke led a 2018 study of over 600 million social media posts for depressive language and suicide data from the U.S. and Mexico, hypothesizing that mental well-being deteriorates during warmer periods and that climate change may be driving higher rates of suicide. The authors of the study suggest that an additional 3-40 thousand suicides may occur before 2050 as a result of a warming climate. Solastalgia, or emotional distress caused by environmental change, is a known phenomenon that increases this risk. Another 2018 study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States supports Burke's hypothesis with meteorological data and reports of mental health difficulties between 2002-2012.

A 2009 study published in the journal Science Communication assessed media representations of climate change and found that while fear-inducing reporting on climate change increases general awareness of the issues and scope of climate change, such representations may be counterproductive. The authors, Saffron O'Neil and Sophie Nicholson-Cole, assert that extreme negative portrayals of climate change may disengage the public, leading instead to climate change denial, lower engagement with efforts to combat climate change, and increased climate anxiety.

Though youth mortality data has shown a trend toward shorter life expectancy since 2014, there are some areas where remedies may be available. The authors of the November 2019 study “Life Expectancy and Mortality Rates in the U.S., 1959–2017” suggest that the correlation between longer life expectancy and health-care systems that provide universal access to care may indeed be causal in nature. Furthermore, the study suggests political measures to reduce wealth inequality can dramatically improve life expectancy.

If you or someone you know struggle with suicidal thoughts, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

If you or someone you know struggles with alcohol or drug dependency, please call the Alcohol and Drug Help Line at 1-800-923-4357.

Oregon.gov’s public health guide for naloxone stresses that “Naloxone only works for opioid drugs, including heroin, morphine, oxycodone (e.g. OxyContin, Percocet), oxymorphone (e.g. Opana), methadone, hydrocodone (e.g. Vicodin), codeine, and fentanyl.” Naloxone is available through many places including your local pharmacist and through syringe exchange programs like Multnomah County Heroin Reduction Clinic and Mobile Exchange, Portland People’s Outreach Project (PPOP), and Max’s Mission. Training on the use of naloxone can be found at Oregon.gov, through your pharmacist, or through syringe exchange programs like the ones listed above.
Bees are responsible for the pollination of one-third of all food consumed in the United States, yet bee populations are rapidly decreasing to the point that eight bee species in the US, including the once common rusty-patched bumblebee, have been listed as endangered. Habitat destruction, the use of certain pesticides, and climate change are all responsible for the decline of pollinating bees, posing grave risks to crops and biodiversity.

As populations are declining in number, bee researchers are finding more ways that the human population relies upon bees. Today, honey is used medicinally to help in the healing of burns and in wound care. According to an article published in Nursing Standard, a journal of the Royal College of Nursing in the UK, honey expedites the healing of minor burns by an average of four days. Beyond this, the antibiotic properties of honey have been proven to help with conditions ranging from common ailments like sore throat to autoimmune diseases such as ulcerative colitis and Crohn’s disease. With more research, honey could play an important role in future pharmaceutical development.

Humans have interrupted bee habitats by extensively creating flowerless cityscapes and planting turf grass where natural plants once grew. The combination of habitat destruction and climate change has resulted in widespread colony collapse due to pesticide use, starvation, and the creation of favorable environments for parasites that harm bee populations. Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) describes the global and sudden die-off of many colonies. CCD was first noticed in 2006 and is one of the most prominent and elusive detriments to bees. CCD manifests itself as a variety of symptoms; such as bacterial infection, viruses, and parasites. Scientists have yet to find the exact cause or cure for the disease. However, many scientists point to pesticides, stress, starvation, or a combination of elements as potential causes of CCD. According to the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign (NAPPC), 50–90% of managed bees in the U.S. have been lost to CCD.

Additionally, bees are particularly disadvantaged to cope with climate change according to the 2015 article by Marissa Fessenden appearing in Smithsonian Magazine. The rise in global temperature is causing flowers to bloom earlier while bees are still coming out late. This results in an increasingly harmful cycle of flowers not being sufficiently pollinated and bees having less food.

Initiatives to protect bee populations are beginning globally, including a program in Norway to plant flowers along roadways to prevent starvation. Other initiatives include protecting eight species of bees as endangered in the United States, the conversion of some billboards in Sweden into “bee hotels,” and the banning of bee-killing pesticides including sulfoxaflor and neonicotinoids. Bavaria plans to have 100% of green spaces into bee-friendly flowering meadows. In Canada, research is being done to help protect bees against disease with the use of probiotics. Conversely, in 2019 the Trump Administration reversed a previous EPA policy barring the use of sulfoxaflor and increased the number of permitted crops for sulfoxaflor use.

Individuals can aid bee populations by planting more flowers. Planting more flowering plants would give bees more food so they could travel further and pollinate more, which would in turn help protect against starvation, stress, and restore lost bee habitat. Choosing plants that flower multiple times a year and only using natural fertilizers and pesticides give bees the best chance of improving colony survival. One way to secure more land for flowering plants is to find alternatives to turf grass. Turf grass covers 40 million acres in America, it does not feed pollinators or humans and requires 60 million acre-feet of water annually. If all turf grass were exchanged for a flowering alternative bee populations could experience profound benefits. A few simple alternatives could be clover and creeping thyme, which are both low maintenance options that stay low to the ground.
TAKE A NAP!
Sleep deprivation and the brain
by Vivian Veidt

Illustration by Greer Siegel
Infographic by Elizabeth Hung
Sleep deprivation is a global risk to individual health and economic prosperity, according to RAND, a research agency and public policy think tank based in California. According to a 2016 report, sleep deprivation in the United States is responsible for over $400 billion in annual economic loss from absent and exhausted workers. Symptoms of sleep deprivation include drowsiness, difficulty concentrating, impaired memory, impaired immune-system response, and physical fatigue. Advanced sleep deprivation may also increase the risk of developing mental illness, hallucinations, and severe mood swings.

The CDC recommends a minimum of 7 hours of sleep per day for healthy brain function in adults, but during an interview with The Pacific Sentinel Dr. Bill Griesar—senior instructor at Portland State University and Neuroscience Coordinator of Northwest Neuroscience Outreach Group Growing in Networks (NW NOGGIN)—added that adolescents, including college-aged youth, require approximately 8–9 hours of nightly sleep to remain healthy. An estimated 60% of students and 35% of American adults across all demographics fail to meet either standard. Sleep deprivation is of particularly dire concern for the estimated 10–14% of university students who experience homelessness and up to 48% who experience some form of housing insecurity according to a 2019 survey released by The Hope Center.

The 2016 report from RAND implicated stress caused by “lifestyle factors related to a modern 24/7 society, such as psychosocial stress, alcohol consumption, smoking, lack of physical activity and excessive electronic media use” as the cause of increasing rates of sleep deprivation. “From a research and biological perspective there are some certain basics that we should be providing, and then I think we would be astonished at all the amazing things that people are capable of doing,” noted Griesar. Continuing, Griesar considers meeting basic needs critical for sleep and brain health. “Access to safe and secure housing is certainly a significant issue,” noted Griesar, whose role in NW NOGGIN involves working with disadvantaged and often unhoused youth. Griesar continued to implicate that economic challenges facing young people, including limited access to healthy diets and the stress caused by financial hardship, are key cultural factors in rates of sleep deprivation in the general population.

Dr. Griesar asserts cultural factors are also responsible for inaction on endemic poor sleep in the United States: “There’s a cultural sense of ‘I did it, you can do it,’” elaborating that resistance to systemic changes that could benefit the entire population can be withheld out of perceived unfairness to generations past. Likewise, Griesar implicated a cultural equation of sleep with laziness, introducing shame into the pursuit of a basic need. Questioned about solutions, Dr. Griesar added, “evidence-based research should actually inform better public policy...we have information, we should be applying it.”

Of the evidence-based solutions that are recommended by Griesar and other academics concerned with the health impacts of sleep, the importance of sleep was questioned by all. Griesar indicated access to resources and later class start times as essential to mitigating sleep deprivation on college campuses. A study conducted among secondary-school students in Seattle, dubbed “Sleepless No More in Seattle,” produced compelling results indicating that later class start times led to improvements in mental health, attention span, lower anxiety, and even fewer lives lost to suicide and traffic accidents. Griesar stressed the need to “recognize that there’s a biological basis for a lot of this,” using discord between the natural biological sleep patterns of adolescents and early class start times to demonstrate that societal norms are not always the healthiest strategies for the brain.

Dr. Griesar offers practical advice for anyone struggling to get enough sleep. “Don’t always consider sleep as one long-term, unbroken period,” advised Griesar over a discussion about international sleep standards—particularly the “siesta” of Spain and their former colonies. Spain, despite short overnight sleep patterns, reports relatively high total minutes of daily sleep and higher quality of rest due to the cultural habit of sleeping during the day. This healthy habit, however, is under threat from businesses wanting to accommodate international workdays by denying employees the opportunity to siesta. For those with the luxury of time, even brief periods between classes, Griesar simply advises prioritizing rest. If nothing else, “Take a nap!”

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**7 HOURS**

of sleep / day

**8-9 HOURS**

of nightly sleep

recommended for **adults**

required for **adolescents**

**FAIL TO MEET EITHER STANDARD.**

**60%**

of students

**35%**

of American adults

**ANNually ECONOMIC LOSS FROM ABSENT AND EXHAUSTED WORKERS.**

**$400 BILLION**

in the **UNITED STATES.**
Making People Homeless: Our Country's Collective Shame

Fixing the homeless crisis is a responsibility we all share

by Van Vanderwall Photographs by Jade Dowdy

Who is to blame in our country?
Never can get to the one.
Dealing in multiplication,
And they still can’t feed everyone. Oh, no.

-Eddy Grant, “Electric Avenue”

During a recent trip to Salem, I drove by Salem Center mall. Tents, sleeping bags, shopping carts, tarps: a shanty town of synthetic fibers occupied the block of Center Street between Liberty and High Street. About two weeks earlier, police had cleared a homeless camp in another part of downtown. Secluded private property near Wallace Marine Park, the site of illegal camping for decades, was likewise cleared in September. Even further back, in January of last year the city dismantled an encampment under the Marion Street Bridge and erected blockades to prevent reoccupation.

The ongoing saga of homelessness in Oregon’s capital is the same all over the country. People camp somewhere, the police clear the camp, the homeless population move somewhere else, and the cycle repeats. If the problem remains unsolved and the symptoms shift from one part of town to another, is “clear” the right word to use? How is it that we have come to accept it as normal to ignore, both as individuals and as a group, the large number of people living on the street?

In his book Bullshit Jobs, anthropologist David Graeber describes explaining homelessness in America to people in Madagascar, where he was conducting research. “They were flabbergasted to discover that in the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world, there were people sleeping on the streets. ‘But aren’t Americans ashamed?’ one friend asked me. ‘They’re so rich! Doesn’t it bother them to know everyone else in the world will see it as a national embarrassment?’ Graeber rightly points out that widespread homelessness would have been seen as a societal problem, not a moral failure on the part of the individual, by the focus group in Madagascar. In thinking about solutions, the core belief was that homelessness is a problem that affects society as a whole. This isn’t the case in the U.S. at the moment; the problem festers as we continue to view it as an individualized issue.

The general apathy seems to be the logical extension of the philosophy undergirding Margaret Thatcher’s assertion that “there is no such thing as society,” there are only wholly separate individuals whose grouping into cities and nations has no aggregate effect. This extreme form of individualism is now such a prevailing mode of thought that it tends to inform policy in our own country. To the extent that the state adheres to that principle, many of our most pressing problems have come about because of it. Homelessness, mass incarceration, drug use, environmental degradation: these have all reached a crisis point. If they are the individual’s problem, they then become nobody else’s problem. However, these problems grow and affect everyone, creating more problems.

The apathy toward one another is injurious not only to the downtrodden, but to those who avert their attention. Empathy and compassion, relations of reciprocity rather than transaction, benefit everyone. The major religions, whatever their other flaws, classify these traits as virtues; there is then a nearly universal belief, no matter how obstructed by a zero-sum market mentality, that helping our fellow human beings is central to being a good person. Consider, then, how negative the obverse traits are, how much apathy and callousness harm the exalted and humble alike.

When we, as a society, debase the humanity of one group, we debase ourselves as well. Suffering cuts both ways.

Anger is worse than the apathy. Homelessness is often presented as a moral failure: some people are lazy and don’t want to work, and therefore deserve the worst outcome. This approach arises from a punitive mindset (people ought to suffer), perhaps part of our Calvinist cultural heritage. The argument against assistance programs is often presented in terms of cost. How exactly is
cost computed? Is it not a major loss to a capitalist economy for a significant minority to devote their labor to surviving on the streets rather than to profitable enterprise? Does it save money to devote enforcement and cleaning resources to a problem that would be lessened by a more organized approach? Indeed, if our society valued labor the way it claims to, why does it devote so much energy toward palpating the collective wound instead of healing it? Surely some work-for-housing measures, rehabilitation facilities, and mental illness wards would more effectively use labor and capital than allowing a sickness in the social body to go on interminably. The societal refusal to adequately address homelessness only uses the rhetoric of cost to taxpayers to cloak anger toward the downtrodden. As with apathy, anger harms all involved. In the "Ghatva Sutta," the Buddha taught that anger is like a plant with a honeyed tip with poison in its roots; holding on to anger intoxicates even as it harms. It arises from self-loathing, which manifests as loathing of others. Anger is a natural emotion, so there is no way to eliminate it entirely, but it ought not to be the sentiment that governs policy aimed at the most disenfranchised members of society.
Total population experiencing homelessness in 2017: 
Approx. 38,000 individuals experienced homelessness across the Portland tri-county area

15% with Permanent Supportive Housing needed

85% with Services other than PSH* needed

Associated costs: $8,800-$10,000 per household

In 2017: up to 107,000 households were experiencing housing insecurity in the Portland tri-county area

30% of income spent on rent

50% of income spent on rent

Infographic by Kacie Cooper

What is to be done?

Great change begins with small actions. Make eye contact with homeless people. If someone asks for money, give an answer; even to verbally or visually decline is better than to pretend that they are not people at all. No matter how impoverished or ragtag, every one of them at one time had a mother and father; even if they were unwanted from the time of conception, they were nonetheless newborn babies who came into the world the same way everyone does. When asked for money, it may not always be your best option to give some, but consider carrying packaged food like granola bars or fruit bars to give someone who may need it.

The changes that must happen in our governmental bodies are not yet within my grasp, but the cumulative effect of policy over the last several decades seems to have been to streamline the funneling of capital and ownership of land upward while introducing so-called “improvements” that have calcified economic differences into an unacknowledged caste system. Only a concerted effort, over many years, at every level of governance can rectify this. In the meantime, the best sites of change are our minds and the best time to do so is now. Myriad personal changes, such as engaging less with phones and more with the people around us, will shift the cultural sense of empathy and from this effective policy can emerge.

Each person can contribute to a cultural shift. Pull your head out of your phone and look at the world, especially if you’re doing what seems like nothing: waiting in line, standing in an elevator, sitting at a red light, sitting in a waiting room. A shift in thinking will inevitably follow, and a shift in thought precipitates in turn a change in action. It is for others and ourselves that we should change. Mercy benefits both the meek and the mighty.

*PSH is defined as permanent supportive housing as permanent housing with indefinite leasing or rental assistance paired with supportive services to assist homeless persons with a disability or families with an adult or child member with a disability achieve housing stability.
Don't worry about the draft, get mad for the civilians in Iran

by McKinzie Smith

Bringing back the draft is unlikely to happen and don’t let Twitter tell you otherwise.

In case you’ve been out of the loop, a quick rundown of our current conflict with Iran may be in order. Early into the new year, Qasem Soleimani, one of Iran’s most popular military leaders and one of the most powerful people in their country, was assassinated by the U.S. during an air strike. Six others, all involved with Soleimani, died with him. According to President Donald Trump, Soleimani posed an “imminent” threat to America, referring to plans to attack U.S. troops and diplomats in Iran. Despite assertions that the assassination was undertaken to prevent war, it has so far only escalated tensions. Since Soleimani’s death on January 3, mourners in Iran have taken to the streets, chanting “death to America, death to Israel,” and President Hassan Rouhani vowed “revenge for this heinous crime.” Not to mention, there’s currently debate surrounding the legality of Trump’s order to kill Soleimani in the first place, something that will only further create distrust among Iranians toward the U.S.

Before we even think about why people are worried about the U.S. reinstating the draft, we should ask ourselves whether war may or may not genuinely be on the horizon. Though there is a chance that we de-escalate the conflict or that Trump is replaced by a non-warmongering President (like Sanders or Warren), things aren’t looking great at the present moment. Not only has Iran made it clear that they desire retaliation, Trump has jumped on the chance to threaten and cajole at every possible turn (on Twitter, of course). Through his Twitter account, Trump has publicized that the U.S. has targeted 52 Iranian sites “important to Iran & Iranian culture,” that will be “HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD.” Capitalization not mine. (Targeting cultural sites is a war crime.) Iran retaliated on January 8, sending missiles to an Iraqi air base in which American troops were located, accidentally downing a Ukraine International Airlines flight in the process. Since this tragedy, conflict seems to be on a downturn as both Iran and the U.S. struggle against massive backlash.

However, given the aggression and poor decision-making by our President, some still fear that this conflict could lead to war. This threat of war is how the draft has re-entered the conversation. The conversation is, let’s be clear, mostly a springboard for Twitter jokes. However, there is genuine uneasiness under these jokes. For every joke about moving to...
I'm moving to Canada bye

Canada or, for cis-women, playing into gender stereotypes to avoid the draft. Less visibly, the Selective Service System website crashed on Friday, likely from young people attempting to get real information about what the draft is or if it could happen.

Luckily, a draft isn't likely to be in our cards. The draft was abolished after the disastrous Vietnam War. For it to be reinstated, a long process requiring signatures from Congress as well as the President would have to be undertaken. Under the current Congress, the House would be unlikely to pass such a law into order. Doing so would be a huge political move, one that even Trump should think twice about before acting. Given the current panic about the draft, it doesn't seem that public interest in such a thing would be high. Were Trump to attempt to reinstate the draft, not only would the House likely block it, public outcry and fear of losing the presidency would stop him in his tracks. We all know how much being liked means to him and this would be no different.

However, it does raise some good questions about the place of consignment in our country. In the U.S., those recognized as male are made to sign up for selective service. This happens one of two ways: While getting your driver's license or while applying for any kind of financial aid. If you do not sign up for selective service, you may not receive federal financial aid. Many people aren't aware of this, leading to a nasty shock when they go to apply for aid. Lower-income members of society are put at financial risk if they do not wish to be recognized by the U.S. military. This is also true of voluntary military service. It's no secret that recruiters prey on underprivileged kids to go into military service. Yes, the military may give you free schooling and a decent-paying job, but that shouldn't be low-income kids' best option for pursuing a good life in America. The American military industrial complex is built around this fiscal manipulation tactic, so it's unlikely it will go away without intense public outcry. Hopefully, these conversations about the draft can lead us toward real action regarding an outdated, class-discriminatory system. If the draft no longer exists, consignment doesn't need to either.

Even more pressing is the current debate about whether or not those recognized as female should be included in the consignment system. As of the date of this article, the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service is considering changing the rules. The decision is due to be reached in March. Should they decide in favor of forcing both males and females to sign up for selective service, I imagine that even more pushback against the idea of the draft would arise. I'm firmly against anyone having to sign up for selective service, no matter their gender. Military service should be a carefully considered choice, not something someone is forced into. Especially because drafts are only enacted during large-scale, brutal wars, I would argue that making someone participate in this way is a breach of their rights as a human being at the hands of selfish leaders. Though actually bringing back the draft is unlikely, the principle of the concept should be considered highly suspect and prevented at any cost.

Even though we shouldn't worry too much about being drafted any time soon, choose to look outward during this time. After all, civilians in Iran and surrounding countries are currently at risk due to this conflict. They don't need to be drafted to experience war. Instead of making jokes about a non-existent draft, put that energy into speaking out against the war in the first place. Most importantly, vote! Getting Trump out of office is the most efficient way of making it all stop. So please, I beg of you, drop the ballot in the mailbox. Lives have been at stake and they will continue to be so under this presidency.

I WANT YOU
When the sun rose in January 1920, it rose, as it always does, on New Zealand.

The crimson warmth of a new decade shimmered in the waters of the Southern Hemisphere before slowly making landfall. Idyllic coastal shoreline gave way to forest, then outposts, the sun at last illuminating the roads and cities of the grand imperial civilization. It would have reflected off the polished wheels of new industry, the cars and airplanes brought in across the British commonwealth. The sun of 1920 would have shone on factories and coal ships, and on new paved roads. But mostly, as the decade dawned in New Zealand, the sun bathed freshly dug graves.

In the first days of January 1920, the island nation was dying. The influenza pandemic that had spread across the globe reached New Zealand at around the same time as the first bodies came back from the war.

Two gruesome tragedies of the 1910s had devastated the country. 18,000 soldiers had died in the First World War, and another 40,000 were wounded. Many suffered brutal deaths in the failed attack on Gallipoli. The disease that struck shortly afterward—an influenza epidemic colloquially known as the Spanish flu—killed another 9,000 people. Over half the population was affected by one or the other calamity.

The rising sun continued its path, passing the burgeoning imperial Japan to which it would one day give a name and a flag; over Soviet Russia, where the tumult of revolution had finally landed Vladimir Lenin in power; and over the fields of Europe, where carefully dug trench lines still pock-marked the earth.

The new decade heralded an era of peace and astounding prosperity. Industry would advance to unimagined heights. Unrestrained capital would expand endlessly, monopolizing whole sectors of life, producing inconceivable profit and driving the colonization and exploitation of every corner of the globe. It was to be a time of radicalism and revolutionary spirit, where technology and science would spread, for the first time, a world culture across a shattered society.

As the sunlight passed across England and the Atlantic it washed over hideous starvation and poverty. Slums filled with vagrants and streets of beggars. Hospitals crowded with the sick and dying, gutters clogged with bile and mud, ghettos of the poor and disenfranchised alongside gilded towers of excess and wealth.

It would have lit the Potomac River and the White House, where the feeble and partially paralyzed President Woodrow Wilson held increasingly delusional visions of a recovery from his stroke and a third term in office, and passed over the senate building where Warren Harding laid the foundations for a victorious campaign, pledging a return to normalcy from the radicalism and divisions of the past 20 years.

After it had swept across all the Eastern seaboard, the American sunrise fell on its last great political player: An inmate in the Atlanta federal penitentiary.

Exactly 100 years ago, Eugene Victor Debs ran the last of his campaigns for president as a socialist. He did it from jail.
When he began his career, Debs was a moderate union organizer; but he was radicalized after watching striking workers attacked by police and became convinced that workers needed to organize across entire industries, not just in small trades.

Debs's strategy proved right. The American Railway Union he organized quickly won impressive victories. In 1894, they organized a massive strike that paralyzed the nation's rail system, protesting wage cuts and rent raises in company towns. In response, the U.S. military was called in to break the strike. They killed 30 striking workers, and injured another 50, before arresting the strike leaders.

If Debs had harbored any illusions of the possibility of cooperation between workers and bosses, they were destroyed that day. He would later write, "In the gleam of every bayonet and the flash of every rifle the class struggle was revealed."

Sitting in that jail cell in 1894, something happened to Debs. Something that would set him on the path to become one of the defining figures of the next few decades. Something that would convince millions to follow him and fight alongside him and, eventually, something that would land him back in jail again in 1920. Because while he was in jail, in 1894, Debs was visited by an Austrian immigrant named Victor Berger, who gave him a copy of Capital, by Karl Marx.

A century on from the terror and tumult of the 1920s, American socialism is on the rise again. Far from a trade unionist or jailed activist, Bernie Sanders is the unlikely face of a political movement powered mostly by people 50 and 60 years his junior.

And yet, since the end of the Obama presidency, the Senator has become one of the dominant figures of the political scene. With unshakeable consistency, the septuagenarian has railed against inequality and poverty. To party power brokers, his 2016 primary challenge was just a speed bump on the predictable road to President Hillary Clinton.

But against all odds and expectations, Sanders found a base of support. Decrying billionaires and bankers, his thick Brooklyn accent and unkempt hair became iconic symbols and his curmudgeonly demeanor tapped into an anger in the electorate.

His base was shockingly versatile, winning over 10 million votes and 23 states. But Sanders's message truly found a home with young voters. He has consistently led in approval ratings with people under 35, even as he has struggled with others.

The son of Polish immigrants, Sanders's early life was in many ways unrecognizable to the people who would one day support him. Growing up in rent-controlled housing in the post-war boom years, Sanders's upbringing bridged the divide between Jewish radical tradition and a discomfort with organized religion. Like Debs, Sanders came of age in a time of conflict, joining the civil rights movement. After graduating from the University of Chicago, Sanders moved to Vermont, where he ran fringe third party campaigns in senatorial and gubernatorial races.

Running on radical platforms, branding himself a Democratic Socialist, by all political wisdom Sanders should have stayed just that, a fringe radical. Instead, his message found a home in Vermont, where he narrowly won a mayoral campaign that kickstarted his career. Burlington, where he narrowly won a mayoral campaign that kickstarted his career. It may have been a surprise to establishment media, but perhaps not for Sanders. After all, Sanders had produced a documentary on Eugene Debs. The two, as well as socialists across the centuries, recognized the existence of a winning coalition of workers, radicals, and the disenfranchised. They believed that, if all people could just be convinced to fight for one another, they could transform the world.

To understand how exactly this process has happened, and what we are to make of it, it's important to understand just what is meant when the term socialism is used. For our purposes, the concept can be kept relatively simple. Socialism is a form of economic organization where the "means of production" (the resources you use to make a product; factories, nails, conveyor belts, wood, etc.) are controlled by the workers.

This core definition is about the only thing all socialists agree on. Who the workers are, how they are to seize control of the means of production, and what they should do once they have them are matters of great internal debate. But the vast majority of socialists broadly agree with the argument of Karl Marx that society is divided into economic classes, the two key groups of which are the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production, and the proletariat, who provide the labor necessary to actually produce.

To that end, most socialists advocate for unions—organizations where workers in a trade or industry come together to collectively bargain. While an individual worker has almost no leverage, when all workers in a factory come together and say they will strike until they receive fairer treatment, they can force the bosses hand.

Not all union members are socialists. In fact, in the 1950s, almost all socialists and communists were purged from unions. Socialists don't just advocate that workers in a single industry demand higher pay. They say that all workers should join together to take on the ruling class. Socialists and communists have historically been
the most radical labour organizers, the most willing to call for strikes and take on bosses, the most willing to use drastic tactics to force the company’s hand, and the most determined to form unions in industries that don’t currently have them.

In 1920, millions across the world were sold on the visions of socialists, be they Debs or Lenin, by the horrors of war and poverty. While the elite leaders of society hoarded ever greater profits, the working class was mired in poverty, sacrificed in war and brutalized by imperial ventures. In 2020, capitalism again seems to be failing. College has become less and less affordable, even as it is more necessary than ever. For two decades, America has waged imperial wars in the Middle East, costing trillions of dollars and sacrificing thousands of soldiers for a cause that has done nothing but destabilize the region and kill millions of Iraqis and Afghans. Healthcare costs continue to rise, as insurance premiums leave thousands uncared for. And yet even as American life expectancy declines, corporate profits soar. Arms manufacturers and health care conglomerates make millions off the suffering of the masses.

Bernie Sanders is not a revolutionary. He does not promise to overthrow capitalism like Debs once did. But he is well and truly a socialist. Born of the working class and with a dream forged in the fire of mass discontent, with a vision of an egalitarian America where everyone has a say in government, and we all fight to take care of one another.

The dream of the socialist was always a leap of faith. It was that faith that preserved the movement through the long dark years of red scares and right-wing governments. A faith in an equal society, where people of all genders and races share in the prosperity of our country. A faith in mass movements, in the power of the working class to overwhelm the barriers before them and seize power from the idle rich who control their lives. Faith in the ideal that all our struggles are shared, that we are the collective victims of a single grave crime of exploitation and that it can be overcome only through cooperation.

One hundred years ago, Eugene Debs tried to stop the most horrible war the world had ever seen up to that point: World War I. For the crime of speaking out against it he was jailed. At his trial, where he was to be sentenced, he was permitted to give a closing statement to the jury. “Your Honor,” Debs said, “I ask no mercy and I plead for no immunity. I realize that finally the right must prevail. I never so clearly comprehended as now the great struggle between the powers of greed and exploitation on the one hand and upon the other the rising hosts of industrial freedom and social justice. I can see the dawn of the better day for humanity. The people are awakening. In due time they will and must come to their own.”

No one can say if Sanders will win the primary—he currently sits in a dead heat with Joe Biden. Whether he will then manage to implement his ideas is an even harder question. But it seems doubtful the story of American socialism will end with him. Wherever there is an oppressed class, there is a voice for radical change.

And though the dawn of this new decade brings with it great fears and horrors, in the fires of war and floods of climate change it brings with it something of Debs’ vision as well. In the rise of mass movements which extend far beyond and will last far after the campaign of Bernie Sanders, there is an awakening of the vast working class. People are coming to believe, at last, that in this age of unparalleled prosperity, we can build a kinder and more caring world. One where everyone gets the things which they are owed.

Debs and Sanders are divided by years and values, party and place. But they share one single, towering belief: That political change cannot ever come from above. That if the world is to be remade, it cannot be by a single candidate. That responsibility rests with all of us.
I don't know if I enjoy adult-life surprises. But I do enjoy strapping into the rollercoaster of a narrative not knowing how the story will unfold. I enjoy meeting characters, being let down by them, being inspired by them, being terrified by them, and having the way they act surprise me. I enjoy when the circumstances of a story take me somewhere I hadn't anticipated going. I enjoy not knowing what exactly I'm reading or watching until I've finished the book or the movie's credits are rolling.

Parasite is a thriller from late 2019 by South Korean filmmaker Bong Joon-ho. I had heard it described as a horror movie and only seen very small bits of images about it before going to see it. There were a lot of moments when the movie changed direction and I had to readjust what I thought the movie was about. Perhaps this is because I am not always an active movie watcher: I don’t attempt to think about where the plot will go, I don’t always attempt to decipher what exactly a movie is doing, and maybe it’s actually just because I’m a little bit dumb. Anything is possible.

By not doing much research beforehand, my limited concept of what horror is allowed me to believe the film was much different than the suspense-filled thriller that it was. Perhaps the reason I’m writing about not knowing is because that is one of the themes of the movie itself.

The film centers around two families. The Kim family is poor and job prospects are not going well. They are desperate to find a way to make ends meet when an opportunity comes along for the son to tutor a high school girl in English. It turns out the girl's family, the Parks, are rich. The Kims hatch a plan so that everyone in the family can have a job working for the Parks.

The movie is about class, desperation and deception, identity and mistaken identity, imposter syndrome, fraud as a means to survive, and revenge. The movie is beautifully and mysteriously shot. I'm glad I went in without any idea what the movie was going to be about, because I was surprised and incredibly pleased.

My experience with Korean American Stephi Cha's latest book, Your House Will Pay, was the exact opposite. Before reading it, I had listened to her read a section of the book in the Portland Art Museum as a pop-up reading during the Portland Book Festival where I also saw her on a panel discussing parts of her process and thinking behind some of the fundamental ideas circulating in her brain while writing it.

I actively try not to watch trailers for movies I know I want to see. I tell my partner "No, I don't want you to tell me what happens in that book you're reading. In case I read it in 5 years, I don't want that weird detail from halfway through the book to be a spoiler for me that may inhibit my ability to enjoy the book's story path." But
despite that side of my personality and strategy to approaching new books or movies I still thoroughly enjoyed *Your House Will Pay* despite having a ton of background information about the book. None of the things I knew were catastrophic spoilers, but I did have an awful lot of information.

*Your House Will Pay* is a fictional retelling of the death of Latasha Harlins who was killed as unrest in Los Angeles surrounding the brutal beating of Rodney King by police and simmering tensions between African Americans and Korean Americans in LA was beginning to boil. Harlins was killed by a Korean liquor mart owner's wife who thought she was shoplifting orange juice. The book fictionalizes that event—Cha's retelling has the character attempting to buy milk—and the lives of those two families most directly affected by Harlins's killing in the present-day.

Unlike most of the books I read—authors I already know and like, or recommended by my partner who has great taste in books—I had never heard of Cha before. But listening to Cha read from her book in front of an American flag made of prison uniforms—*Stars and Bars* by Hank Willis Thomas—and talk about her complicated feelings surrounding the burning and looting of Koreatown by African Americans, Latin Americans, and white people as the police and fire departments largely let it happen and didn't really help put out the blaze was intense. I was sold because I knew going in that reading *Your House Will Pay* would be heavy, it wouldn't be an easy jaunt. I was sold because the section of the book Cha read in front of that prison-uniform-flag gripped me, and so I figured it was worth giving it a shot. Despite all of the information I had, the book still surprised me.

I want to re-read *Your House Will Pay*. I want to re-watch *Parasite*. I can't unspoil how those plots will go; but I still am curious to see what other nuggets I can find as I retake the journey. If rewatching or rereading is acceptable to me, then I don't know why watching trailers or listening to reviews wouldn't be okay too.

Sometimes pieces of art really need context in order to be powerful. Mark Bradford's *150 Portrait Tone* probably wouldn't be as powerful if I didn't know what it was about before I stood, engulfed by it. It would definitely still be beautiful, but the information about why it is and what it means is critical in taking the piece's power from monumental to profoundly affecting.

I don't think it matters whether or not we watch trailers or read reviews. We will never be able to have a different experience than the one we have. Our time is precious and we don't want to make bad choices as to how we spend our time, but I think the risk of unknowing is worth it and I wish I managed to approach media that way more often. I think there is something so incredible about being taken to places and into situations you had no idea you would be experiencing.

But there is no right way; and getting very minorly spoiled doesn't take away everything a narrative has to offer. I don't know that anyone else needs to hear this, but I definitely need to stop worrying and allow myself to enjoy things more, preconceived notions or no.
Mo Troper Delivers in New Album

Natural Beauty

by Shane Johnson

Illustration by Josh Gates

I only recently discovered the music of Portland local Mo Troper after seeing him perform at The Fixin’ To’s Elliott Smith 50th Birthday Celebration last summer. Classics from XO and Either/Or were played and I was impressed at how Troper kept the emotion of Smith’s songs at the forefront while filtering them through his own fuzzy guitar and energetic vocals.

While Troper may be new to me, he’s a mainstay in Portland’s indie rock scene with multiple projects to his name. Visiting those records after the Elliott Smith show, I found some charming and well-crafted songs. But there was an electricity within the live performance I was still seeking, which I was pleased to find captured in Troper’s third solo album, Natural Beauty. It releases February 14th and is Troper’s first release on indie label Tender Loving Empire. The sharp lyrics and beautifully realized arrangements make it his best yet.

Troper began the record after moving back to Portland, and Natural Beauty sounds like the start of a new chapter for the artist. His gift for building up memorable melodies has been evident throughout his previous work, but Natural Beauty has refined the details of everything else. Troper’s vocals are distinct and powerful on the album, his expansive vocal range on full display. The instrumental arrangements, carefully written by Troper himself, make much of the difference here. Strings, horns, harp, and more thoughtfully adorn the album in moderation, the arrangements weaving the various sounds together to serve the song most effectively. The album thus manages to be Troper’s most consistent and entertaining power-pop outing yet, while sounding surprisingly timeless.

Turning his focus inward, Troper’s storytelling is often straightforward and confessional. His lyrics conceal more specificity and thoughtfulness than their bright and catchy first impressions may suggest. The album opens with “I Eat,” one of the album’s most distinct accomplishments. The song is a smartly constructed reflection on binge eating that builds to a bombastic musical climax in the moment that it slips unexpectedly to a scene from the past: “The kid who did all his homework on Friday night, / at the mercy of his appetite, / I eat, I eat, I eat.”

Single “In Love With Everyone” is another standout, with an ear-worn chorus Troper belts in a strained falsetto reminiscent of James Mercer’s poppiest compositions. “Your Boy” opens with a riff that would feel at home on a song by The Cure; various flourishes across the album contain shades of everything from 60s surf to 2000s pop punk, the Beatles to Built to Spill.

“Lucky Devils” is one of the most infectious and bubbly songs on the album with a dark take on Troper’s complicated relationship with Portland. “You’ll never find another city with so much natural beauty, and so we kicked all the poor people out,” he sings, taking a jab at the hypocrisies of Portland that all too many citizens are so willing to ignore. “I fell asleep and I woke up in hell,” he croons, a line that will be stuck in your head all day.

Troper certainly presents reason to be jaded or bitter amongst all the beautiful sounds on the album, but sentiment keeps seeping in. The short interlude “Everything” is one of the loveliest moments. Backed by only the gentle “oooh”-ing of harmonizing voices, Troper sings a simple love song: “Winter, fall, summer spring / at the mall or in the rain / when I’m with you it’s all the same. / You’re everything. You’re everything.”

The version of Troper present on Natural Beauty seems willing to let the rough edges smooth out as the years continue to pass. He’s just as interested in examining his past self with a compassionate gaze as he is in confronting the outside world anymore. Beautiful, slower moments such as “Everything” and “Business As Usual” left me wishing for a few more mid-tempo tunes, but the album benefits from not overstaying its welcome. It moves with a good editor’s focus through a variety of ideas and sounds in just under 32 minutes and left me wanting more. The version of Troper present on Natural Beauty seems willing to let the rough edges smooth out as the years continue to pass. He’s just as interested in examining his past self with a compassionate gaze as he is in confronting the outside world anymore. Beautiful, slower moments such as “Everything” and “Business As Usual” left me wishing for a few more mid-tempo tunes, but the album benefits from not overstaying its welcome. It moves with a good editor’s focus through a variety of ideas and sounds in just under 32 minutes and left me wanting more. The version of Troper present on Natural Beauty seems willing to let the rough edges smooth out as the years continue to pass. He’s just as interested in examining his past self with a compassionate gaze as he is in confronting the outside world anymore.

Mo Troper’s album Natural Beauty comes out Feb 14th
Release show February 16th at Holocene, $10, 8p.m., 21+
Wow, you look sick! You feeling alright? What the fuck?!

Say, could you tell me how to get to the Lloyd Center? Sorry... I'm too stupid.

Dad, can you help me with my science project? No, I can't. I'm too stupid.

Do you understand what I mean? Doy!

I can't figure out how to put this IKEA table together. I'm too stupid.

Well, can you give me an estimate? No. Sorry, sir. I'm too stupid.
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