



Publisher's Notebook

December 2020 Matt Winters

Let's emerge from this crisis stronger than ever

This lamentable year will soon be over. But like a terrible undersea earthquake generating a vast set of tsunamis, destructive waves from the pandemic will ripple across our society and economy for months and maybe years ahead.

It's essential for Congress to get busy and pass funding for an extension of COVID unemployment relief, as well as grants and forgivable low-interest loans to keep small businesses alive through the depths of winter and early spring.

Without action, millions will lose jobless aid the day after Christmas. Not only will this inflict pain on families, but their loss of spending power will be felt by every merchant in their communities. This could result in economic damage far greater than the cost of a new government lifeline.

It's also essential to refill the Paycheck Protection Program — with stricter oversight to make sure political insiders don't end up with a

disproportionate share of emergency funds.

There's a decent chance the overall American economy will come roaring back after immunizations are completed for most of the population. But in small towns like all of ours in Clatsop and Pacific counties, homegrown enterprises that represent lifetimes of savings and toil won't be quickly replaced if they are allowed to fail in the pandemic-slowed months directly ahead of us. If they aren't kept alive now, they will become like drowning victims that can't be resuscitated.

Although we have all seen some business start-ups fail through undercapitalization, lack of expertise and a dozen other causes, it will be a great shame if otherwise viable businesses are allowed to go down the drain due to a lack of political will.

Our area has good prospects for economic recovery. An extraordinarily desirable place to live and work, we defy many of the clichés about the rural USA. This recent analysis by the Brookings Institution could have been specifically written about here:

"For decades, local leaders have been implementing locally tai-

lored economic development strategies that value and build upon place-based assets, and have garnered real successes in fostering recreation, amenity-based and service economies that support rural places of opportunity." Numerous local public and private initiatives spring to mind: Astoria's thorough reinvention of downtown, its Riverwalk and trolley, and renovated heritage housing stock; Long Beach's Discovery Trail and tree-lined business district; Seaside's impressive investment in a tsunami-safe school campus; Warrenton's amazing growth into a regional shopping destination. The list could go on and on.

Fundamental to all this are the people who make it happen. It's hard to imagine civic and business leaders any more engaged than, for example, the Ocean Park Area Chamber of Commerce and Community Club, or the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce.

By watching out for one another, we can eventually come out of this crisis stronger than ever.

It's worth your time to read this article about rural resiliency: tinyurl.com/Brookings-Rural.



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