

Cruelty to birds

Under federal law, it is illegal to harass, interfere with, cause distress to, hurt, maim, or kill wildlife. So, how is it that federal employees are about to do all of the above to our wild birds at the mouth of the Columbia? Birds, who were essentially "invited" to make homes there, as a result of the artificial island created by more federal employees, as a result of their dredging activities. This is the cruelest of madness. It's utterly immoral, as well as illegal.

ELAINE BAUER
Astoria

Divulge tsunami risks

The Clatsop County Community Development Department is conducting a Tsunami Hazard Overlay Project. They will present draft policies and provisions to prepare for and survive a Cascadia earthquake and tsunami event to county commissioners for adoption this year. Incorporated cities will likely adopt similar policies and provisions.

The draft code (Section 4.52) states that in the unincorporated areas of the county "all applications for new development or substantial improvements in the Tsunami Hazard Overlay Zone shall be accompanied by a recorded Hazard Acknowledgment and Disclosure statement which would appear in a title search."

It would seem that all properties that are in the tsunami hazard zone should carry such a disclosure. Property owners are required by Oregon law (ORS 105.464) to disclose, when selling, whether their property has any zoning overlays that would affect the property. It would seem that the government agency imposing the zoning overlay has a responsibility for notifying all impacted property owner of this overlay.

JOHN DUNZER
Seaside

Back art education

I again feel compelled to write, this time in response to all the feedback I have received in regards to my letter of May 1 ("Art changes lives," *The Daily Astorian*) both from people on the streets, and in subsequent letters to the editor. How wonderful it is to have people expressing a common belief that art is important.

It is very easy to take the things which nourish our bodies, minds and spirits for granted. That is, until they start slipping away.

It is my hope that those who know better than I where to direct their voices will do so. We all must continue to encourage whatever powers that be to persistently strive to find ways to ensure the continuation of art education at all levels.

RHONDA GRUDENIC
Astoria

No tall buildings

If new 35-foot buildings built over the Columbia would concern you, then attending the Monday Astoria City Council meeting at 7 p.m. is very important. The council could vote on the Bridge Vista Plan that evening, allowing many such buildings. The City Council doesn't need to allow 35-foot buildings, which would begin at Stephanie's Cabin and block the view of much of the bridge and river, as well as that of the Ship Inn.

The Bridge Vista Plan would continue to the other side of the bridge near the Bridgewater Bistro, blocking many views along the way. This plan allows taller buildings on the south side of the trolley tracks. When they are built on both sides of the tracks, you will have a tunnel for both

Good people of Astoria, it's your money

At Astoria City Hall, at 7 p.m. Monday, the mayor and City Council will decide how to disburse almost \$10 million in local taxes, fees, and government grants for the fiscal year 2015-16.

Good people of Astoria, this is your money. With respect to budget funds you must insist on transparency, accountability, and fiduciary stewardship. A review of the budgets for the last five years indicates this will not be an easy task.

Astoria is in the habit of making ends meet by adjusting the budget throughout the year. This is accomplished by transfers from one fund to another, supplemental budgets, or taking out new loans. The budget adjustments for the fiscal year ending June 2014 totaled \$1,060,405. The auditor concludes: "expenditures for the various funds were within authorized appropriations except ..." and then goes on to detail the adjustments.

A forensic accountant has opined that the city's budget, is in part, operationally and legally flawed. The Promote Astoria fund is illustrative. Resource for this fund is the lodging tax, imposed on tourists and visitors to the city. Expenditures based on these taxes are strictly controlled by state law (ORS 320.300 (7);(9) and by Astoria City Code 8.04 5.18.

For the fiscal year 2015-16, the council is asked to approve \$235,000 for "Tourism Promotion and Tourism-Related Facilities." This is a placeholder; no determined specific uses are identified (placeholders are common in the various funds of the budget); \$78,680 is allocated to service the Surging Waves Monument loan, notwithstanding that state law does not allow lodging tax funds for such use.

For 10 years the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce received funds from the city, though there was no contract specifying the use of the money, and no semiannual financial reports required by the city code. The chamber will receive \$305,750, a \$20,000 increase from last year.

Good people of Astoria, it is in your monetary interest to attend and let your voice be heard at City Hall Monday, June 1.

GEORGE MCCARTIN
Astoria

the trolley passengers and Riverwalk users as sadly depicted in the Riverfront Vision Plan.

The council seems on a course to make the river difficult to see until leaving Astoria on one of the bridges. These actions will cost us a significant number of jobs because of impacts to the river and bridge and trolley and Riverwalk that draw tourists and money.

The Bridge Vista Plan requires 40-foot spaces between these buildings. This will allow one to look north to the state of Washington, but not to view the bridge or the expanse of the river and ship activity. It also requires a walkway to the north side of these 35-foot buildings for people to view the river, but that doesn't help the trolley passengers or those strolling the Riverwalk — and who controls access to these walkways?

When one invests in the stock market or gold or land, there is no guarantee of profits. The council can allow use over the water without destroying views or anything that brings tourist dollars to Astoria. I strongly support areas within the Bridge Vista Plan that protect our history and restrict development to the height of the riverbank. The council should have a plan to rehab old existing buildings before allowing these view-blocking ones. The Riverwalk is open to everyone — no matter their economic status — and this wonderful experience should not be degraded.

Astoria's zoning allows for worse, and this plan makes improvements, but the Bridge Vista Plan could be much better. The council should listen to people's current comments. Click on each councilor's name at the city's website to obtain email addresses and send emails. Then attend the 7 p.m. meeting Monday when allowing 35-foot tall buildings over the river could be approved.

GEORGE (MICK) HAGUE
Astoria

Wonderful care

Let me tell you a little about one of Clatsop County's gems, Clatsop Care Center. I can personally attest to the professional, compassionate care received by the residents — I was one for several weeks. All levels of staff's priority concern is the well-being of people in their care.

Check your property tax statement to see what a financial bargain we are blessed to have in our county.

DAN STRITE
Warrenton

Polluted political games

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF
New York Times News Service

I've admired the Clintons' foundation for years for its fine work on AIDS and global poverty, and I've moderated many panels at the annual Clinton Global Initiative.

Yet with each revelation of failed disclosures or the appearance of a conflict of interest from speaking fees of \$500,000 for the former president, I have wondered: What were they thinking?

But the problem is not precisely the Clintons. It's our entire disgraceful money-based political system. Look around:

- Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey accepted flights and playoff tickets from Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, who has business interests Christie can affect.

- Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida has received financial assistance from a billionaire, Norman Braman, and has channeled public money to Braman's causes.

- Jeb Bush likely has delayed his formal candidacy because then he would have to stop coordinating with his super PAC and raising money for it. He is breaching at least the spirit of the law.

When problems are this widespread, the problem is not crooked individuals but perverse incentives from a rotten structure.

"There is a systemic corruption here," says Sheila Krumholz of the Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks campaign money. "It's kind of baked in."

Most politicians are good people. Then they discover that money is the only fuel that makes the system work and sometimes step into the bog themselves.

Money isn't a new problem, of course. John F. Kennedy was accused of using his father's wealth to buy elections. In response, he joked that he had received the following telegram from his dad: "Don't buy an-

other vote. I won't pay for a landslide!"

Yet Robert Reich, Bill Clinton's labor secretary and now chairman of the national governing board of Common Cause, a nonpartisan watchdog group, notes that inequality has hugely exacerbated the problem.

Billionaires adopt presidential candidates as if they were prize racehorses. Yet for them, it's only a hobby expense.

For example, Sheldon and Miriam Adelson donated \$92 million to super PACs in the 2012 election cycle; as a share of their net worth, that was equivalent to \$300 from the median American family. So a multimillionaire can influence a national election for the same sacrifice an average family bears in, say, a weekend driving getaway.

Money in politics both reflects inequality and amplifies it.

Money doesn't always succeed, of course, and billionaires often end up wasting money on campaigns. According to the *San Jose Mercury News*, Meg Whitman spent \$43 per vote in her failed campaign for governor of California in 2010, mostly from her own pocket. But Michael Bloomberg won his 2009 re-election campaign for mayor of New York City after, according to the *New York Daily News*, spending \$185 of his own money per vote.

The real bargain is lobbying — and that's why corporations spend 13 times as much lobbying as they do contributing to campaigns, by the calculations of Lee Drutman, author of a recent book on lobbying.



Nicholas Kristof

The health care industry hires about five times as many lobbyists as there are members of Congress. That's a shrewd investment. Drug company lobbyists have prevented Medicare from getting bulk discounts, amounting to perhaps \$50 billion a year in extra

profits for the sector.

Likewise, lobbying has carved out the egregious carried interest tax loophole, allowing many financiers to pay vastly reduced tax rates. In that respect, money in politics both reflects inequality and amplifies it.

Lobbyists exert influence because they bring a potent combination of expertise and money to the game. They gain access, offer a well-informed take on obscure issues — and, for a member of Congress, you think twice before biting the hand that feeds you.

The Supreme Court is partly to blame for the present money game, for its misguided rulings that struck down limits in campaign spending by corporations and unions and the overall political donation cap for individuals.

Still, President Barack Obama could take one step that would help: an executive order requiring federal contractors to disclose all political contributions.

"President Obama could bring the dark money into the sunlight in time for the 2016 election," notes Michael Waldman of the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law. "It's the single most tangible thing anyone could do to expose the dark money that is now polluting politics."

I've covered corrupt regimes all over the world, and I find it ineffably sad to come home and behold institutionalized sleaze in the United States.

Reich told me that for meaningful change to arrive, "voters need to reach a point of revulsion." Hey, folks, that time has come.



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All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the

letter was published. Disclosure should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner. Letters referring to news stories should also mention the headline and date of publication.

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