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End the silence

Astoria City Council vote on LNG will be timely

During the last decade of his mayoralty, Willis Van Dusen took no stand on the matter of liquefied natural gas — at prospective sites upriver at Bradwood or downriver on the Skipanon.

While the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners was consumed with divisive LNG politics and county voters in three elections registered their disapproval of the LNG projects, the silence of the Astoria City Council has been curious at best, irresponsible at worst.

That is about to change. As Derrick DePledge reported Tuesday, the council will take up a resolution to register its disapproval of Oregon LNG's proposed facility. Mayor Arline LaMear and City Councilor Cindy Price hope a council vote will motivate Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden to openly oppose the project.

Oregon LNG's foothold on the Skipanon is Peter Gearin's bad joke on our county — the gift that keeps on giving. As executive director of the Port of Astoria in 2004, Gearin signed a lease — following negligible public notice and discussion — that does not reward the Port, while it has condemned our county to a decade of acrimony.

Economic colonialism is the best way to understand the predatory interests of the Calpine Corp. and its successor, Oregon LNG. The mega-projects of Big Energy use the natural resources of a community or region to send vast

amounts of money to corporate headquarters in faraway states. In general, the communities of Clatsop County are negligible in these companies' eyes. It is no secret that the real profit in this LNG terminal — for Calpine and now for Oregon LNG — is to flip it.

Astoria Councilor Russ Warr will likely be casting the only "no" vote. He faults opposition to the LNG plant for not being science-based. Of course, councilors are not scientists. Councilors represent Astoria citizens. It is an easy surmise that a large majority of Warr's constituents strongly oppose the facility.

DePledge also reported that "Warr believes many opponents simply 'think it's going to look ugly.'" Warr is right about that. An LNG facility on the Skipanon would dramatically degrade the aesthetic of the entrance to the Columbia River.

To say "no" to an LNG terminal is to reject the boom-and-bust economics and environmental degradation that are the companions of Big Energy. It is no secret that the way a company like Oregon LNG makes money off this is to flip the project.

It is excellent that Mayor LaMear is scheduling this vote. It's time to end the silence in City Hall.

All eyes on the canaries

'Canary in a coal mine' is a dated allusion that increasingly requires explanation in a world in which underground coal mining is declining. It may be that the phrase "Seabirds dying on the beach" will come to replace it.

Canaries are famously sensitive to small concentrations of toxic methane and other gases that accumulate in coal mine tunnels, so they used to serve as living alarm systems. When they fell off their cage perches, miners knew they needed to evacuate immediately or risk death themselves.

Seabirds are in nearly constant contact with the marine environment, spending an average of 80 percent of their lives on the water. Here along the rim of the Pacific Ocean, they are encountering a variety of conditions unlike what they have evolved with. "The Blob," a peculiarly warm patch of seawater along hundreds of miles of the ocean-land interface from Alaska to Northern California, has brought changes in weather patterns, microscopic life and the entire food chain. Probably related to this warm water, there is an unprecedented bloom of algae that sometimes produces a potent toxin deadly to birds and mammals. Plastic contamination grows as a problem — both in the form of familiar maritime litter and micro-pellets that are widely used in everything from toothpaste to hand soap.

The ocean is intrinsically hazardous and there's always been a lot of bird mortality. But there now is more than normal. The latest bad news on this subject from the North Pacific is outlined in an Aug. 30 story on National Public Radio, "In the stomach of a seabird, a glimpse of an ocean heating up" (tinyurl.com/SeabirdStoryonNPR).

Research outlined in this story show major shifts in diet for seabirds, along with plenty of plastic they ingest along the way. The Arctic is changing faster than anywhere else on earth as the oceans and atmosphere warm. This hasn't yet thrown

Aleutian Islands seabirds into crisis mode — birds are adaptable and seabirds are more mobile than most. But seabird populations have been on a decline for a number of years. Troubling die-offs can take big bites out species in just a season.

Here at the mouth of the Columbia, far to the south of the Aleutians but on the edge of closely interlinked ocean habitats, seabird deaths and ailments are a continuing source of concern.

The *Daily Astorian's* recent Friday Extra feature on the Wildlife Center of the North Coast provided readers with a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the rescuers who try to nurse birds back to health after they are found dying on beaches in Clatsop and Pacific counties. Often, they are starving young birds unable to prosper in local waters that ebb and flow in terms of available nutrients. Other individuals are tangled in fishing line or have swallowed plastic, making it difficult to digest actual food.

Common murrens have been among the center's most common patients — about 700 last year, with an expectation of that many again this year. Dead and dying murrens and other small seabirds sometime dotted local beaches, with individuals every few feet — a disturbing clue about an unforgiving environment.

The Wildlife Center deserves a lot of praise and support for its efforts to alleviate suffering among birds that are victims of an ocean that can always be deadly, and is made even more so by human actions. More volunteer support and funding are warranted for the center and related efforts elsewhere.

Beyond this, ongoing monitoring and research are essential to understand what seabird mortality can tell us about all that is happening off our shores. Bird deaths can serve as an irreplaceable gauge of ocean conditions. Old coal miners knew they had to keep an eye on their canaries. We would be foolish to ignore emerging trends for seabirds. We, too, depend on healthy oceans.

GUEST COLUMN

Getting better set for the 'Big One'

By U.S. REP. SUZANNE BONAMICI

A lot of people read "The Really Big One," Kathryn Schulz's *New Yorker* article about the Cascadia earthquake and tsunami that are forecast to strike the Pacific Northwest.

The article caused shockwaves of its own across our region.

The information is not new to most of us here at home, but the vivid description of the risk to lives and the regional economy has generated a really big amount of anxiety in Oregon.

It's alarming to read that the largest natural disaster to hit North America might happen right here at home. But as a lawmaker, I am also deeply concerned about the article's reminder that we are nowhere as prepared as we can and should be given how much we know about this threat. In the article, OSU earthquake expert Chris Goldfinger discusses the growing gap between what we know and what we should do about it.

I have made closing this gap a priority in my work in Congress. I've supported additional research, advocated for federal investment in resilience, and raised awareness among my colleagues in Congress. But there is still work to be done.

Many Oregon communities are already taking action. For example, Cannon Beach set up cache sites in evacuation areas where residents can store food, water, and supplies in barrels. Last year, I participated in their Race the Wave 5K walk/run, which followed the tsunami evacuation route from the beach to the cache site so residents and visitors are familiar with the route.

At the state level, Oregon lawmakers authorized The Oregon Resilience Plan. This comprehensive plan recommends policies to protect lives and the economy during and after a Cascadia event. Oregon Emergency Management is working with FEMA on Cascadia Rising, an earthquake and tsunami functional exercise that's planned for next summer. And the Legislature just

We can start by providing federal funding for research and development.



Erick Bengel/The Daily Astorian File

U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, D-Ore., explains the importance of investing in tsunami preparation to the fun run participants in October. Taking measures now, she said, will not only help to ensure that more people survive, it will make it easier for cities to rebuild after the disaster.

passed several resilience-building bills, including provisions for seismic rehabilitation of schools and other critical infrastructure.

The state is making progress, but the federal government can and should do much more. FEMA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are engaged in earthquake and tsunami research and education, but these

efforts are not nearly enough. Oregonians face the complicated task of needing to prepare for an event on a scale not experienced in more than 315 years. Unfortunately, federal funding for hazard mitigation and resilience is generally limited to events that have already occurred and caused damage, like Hurricane Katrina or Superstorm Sandy. This tendency to be reactive rather than proactive is shortsighted, and I'm committed to doing what I can to work on prevention.

We can start by providing federal funding for research and development. The U.S. Geological Survey just awarded \$4 million to universities in the Pacific Northwest and California for an earthquake early warning system. And I am pleased that one of the first bills the U. S. House passed this

session was my bipartisan Tsunami Warning, Research and Education Act. Once it passes the Senate, this Act will support NOAA's tsunami research and community-specific outreach and resilience activities. It's a good start, but only a small part of a long list of research and outreach needs.

Local and state governments also need resources to assess, plan, and respond to a Cascadia earthquake. At an implementation meeting for the Oregon Resilience Plan last year, we discussed the importance of planning and response training for communities. The disruption to transportation and communications systems will likely mean that many communities, particularly in rural areas, will be cut off from relief services. Communities need to be able to react and respond so people are safely evacuated, able to shelter in place, and endure winter weather, fire, medical emergencies, or food and water shortages.

The scope of what we face can seem overwhelming, but it is not insurmountable. I will continue to advocate for preparing for a Cascadia earthquake and tsunami. Smart investments now will save lives, property, and money later, and will help the regional economy recover faster. Join me in building on this momentum toward a more resilient future for Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, D-Ore., represents the 1st District.

Examining the Joe Biden delusion

By FRANK BRUNI

New York Times News Service

Many politicians seem intent on holding themselves as far back from us as possible, on parceling themselves out in only the smallest and most controlled bits.

Even as they implore us to love them and insist that we trust them, they're stingy. Cagey. Coiled.

Not Joe Biden. Where others say too little, he says too much. Where others depend on extravagantly compensated swamis to contrive their authenticity and coax them toward it, Biden needs help tamping down his irrepressible self.

How I've loved watching him over his decades in public life.

How I'd hate to see him enter the presidential race and punctuate those years with a final defeat.

Biden, Biden, Biden. The drumbeat swells, coming from all directions, even from Dick Cheney. He recently did an interview with CNN, the first snippets of which were shown on Monday, and offered Biden the following counsel about 2016: "Go for it." This is probably the most compelling evidence that Biden shouldn't. When Cheney itches for an intervention, beware.

Biden's own moves, including a scheduled appearance next Thursday on "The Late Show With Stephen Colbert," further stoke speculation and hopes.

But while many Democrats have enormous respect for him and he's done plenty to deserve it, this isn't really about him. It's about Hillary Clinton: her presumptuousness, the whole email mess, the sloppy administration of the Clinton Foundation, the sense that scandals are as inextricable from her political iden-

tity as pantsuits.

Some Democratic leaders and operatives would desperately like an alternative — an alternative, that is, with better general-election prospects than a 73-year-old socialist with little support from minorities. Martin O'Malley hasn't come through: He might as well be an apparition for all the impact he's made. Someone else is needed. Cue the Biden talk.

We journalists eagerly amplify it, because nothing improves a narrative like the addition of an especially colorful character. We disingenuously pretend that his favorability ratings and other flattering poll results have the same meaning as corresponding numbers for Clinton and Bernie Sanders.

They don't, because he's a hypothetical candidate and they're actual ones, and it's the difference between a courtship in its dawn and a marriage in its dusk. Once someone has really moved into the house and is leaving dirty dishes in the sink, the electricity dims and everything droops.

Even while drooping, Clinton holds onto a great deal of support, and she stands on the very territory that Biden, to get the nomination, would need.

"He's neither to the left of her, where the energy of the party is, nor is he newer than her," one Democratic strategist said. "He personifies neither progressivity nor change. And you need to have one of the two — preferably, both — to win."

Clinton's familiarity is mitigated by the possibility that she'd make history: the first woman in the White House. Biden has nothing like that going for him.

He's a profoundly awkward fit for this strange political moment,



Frank Bruni

this season of outsiders and insurgents.

Voters are sour on career politicians, and Biden's career in politics spans about 45 uninterrupted years.

Voters are anti-Washington in particular, and more than 42 of those years have been spent in the nation's capital, as a senator from Delaware

and then as the vice president.

Aspects of his legislative record are more troubling for him now than ever before. As Nicholas Fandos noted in a recent story in *The Times*, Biden pushed for, and later crowed about, tough-on-crime legislation in the 1980s and 1990s that preceded the mass incarceration of today. That would be a wedge between him and the Democratic Party's black voters especially.

And as Steve Eder noted in another recent story in *The Times*, Biden was, of necessity, an ambassador for the financial services industry in Delaware. That hardly positions him to win the favor of liberal Democrats who yearn for a crackdown on Wall Street.

Biden has twice before pursued the Democratic nomination and never won a single state. The last time, in 2008, he got less than 1 percent of the vote in the Iowa caucuses and then quickly dropped out.

And while much about circumstances and about Biden has changed since then, what hasn't, at least not significantly, is the uncorked, uncensored quality that contributed to his troubles before.

He rolls his eyes. He reaches out with his hands. He talks and talks, in sentences that sometimes go too far, with words that haven't been weighed as carefully as they could be. The route from his brain to his lips is direct and swift. None of the usual traffic cones there.

Sometimes this is enervating. Mostly it's endearing. For better or worse, it's not the means to a promotion, not for this remarkable man at this remarkable time.