

Free from religion

In his letter “God’s Country” (*The Daily Astorian*, Oct. 16), Ronald Wall contends that our founding fathers were devout Christians who intended religion to be an integral part of Americans’ lives. This is not the conclusion reached by essentially all conventional historians at major universities. Some founders were Orthodox Christians, many were rationalists, other deists, with perhaps an atheist or two thrown in.

Contrary to Wall’s letter, George Washington does not appear to have been religious — rarely receiving communion, only going to church on Easter and Christmas, and not requesting clergy presence at his death. When Washington did mention religion, it was generally in deistic terms using “Providence,” “The Grand Architect,” and the “Author of all Good” instead of a personal God, and he never wrote a word about Jesus. It seems Washington invoked religion largely to keep his unruly troops in line.

Thomas Jefferson, an outspoken deist, is seen as the consummate skeptic who took a razor blade to edit the Gospels. James Madison, father of our Constitution, said, “The number, the industry, and the morality of the priesthood and the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of church and state.” James Monroe spoke so little about religion historians suspect he was atheist.

Madison and Jefferson introduced a number of bills to the Virginia House of Delegates to end church establishment, arguing that religion did not need the support of government. Jefferson’s “Religious Freedom Bill” took a strong stand against state-supported religion, and guaranteed free religious exercise to all. The church, according to our founding fathers, held no special place in secular politics. It was one of many voluntary associations in which people belonged like clubs, lodges, and trade unions. They rejected the idea of a Christian state, and saw the state as a secular institution uninterested in people’s souls.

The fact that God or Jesus is never mentioned in our Constitution is strong evidence that the founders intended our nation to be secular. Few countries have as much religious diversity as ours. One study estimates there are some 2,000 active faith groups and denominations in the U.S. All of these beliefs exist side by side, and we have been spared the excesses of religious conflicts observed in other parts of the world, because we have our secular Constitution and wise tradition of church/state separation to thank.

ED JOYCE
Astoria

Attribution needed

Regarding suggestions about Heritage Square in Astoria (“Out with the hole, in with the new,” *The Daily Astorian*, Oct. 20), I have a few.

There would be no heritage attributable to Astoria without the Clatsop Indians.

There would be no heritage attributable to Astoria without John Jacob Astor and the fur trading company.

There would be no heritage attributable to Astoria without U.S. President Thomas Jefferson, who commissioned the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

There would be no heritage attributable to Astoria without Lewis and Clark, and the brave pioneers who forged the Oregon Trail.

Capt. Robert Gray, and many other hardy explorers who also contributed to the Oregon and Astoria heritage, should be given recognition if we are truly endeavoring to commemorate our origins.

JIM RAY
Hammond

Beach love

Since my days in Portland, Sand now here in Gearhart, I have been puzzled by Matt Love’s unrelenting paens to Oregon’s “historic Beach Bill,” which created Oregon’s public beach access.

I am certain that being about double Love’s age, and loving beaches at least as much as he does, I have spent more days there, from my childhood summer days on Coney Island’s beaches, to my daily walks at

So much for democracy

One of the basic tenants of democracy is “majority rules.” Ninety-three percent of Americans were in favor of eliminating the loophole in background checks — the Republican majority, instead, voted for the wishes of the National Rifle Association (NRA). So much for democracy.

Ben Carson, Republican presidential hopeful, when questioned as to how he would address the gun violence, parroted Wayne La Pierre’s insane remedy: To arm the teachers. I would have asked Carson, “And exactly how would that reduce gun violence?” Adding more guns is like spreading the Ebola virus to cure the epidemic.

The Second Amendment was ratified on Dec. 15, 1791, and it reads in its entirety: “A well-regulated Militia, be-

ing necessary to the security of the Free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.”

Emblazoned in the front lobby of NRA headquarters in Washington, D.C., is: “The right of the people to keep and bear arms will not be infringed.” Omitting the purpose and intention of the amendment. A lie by omission.

In the Roaring Twenties, the Tommy gun was the Mafia’s Weapon of choice because of its large clip and rapid fire. The weapon was removed from the market, no longer available to the public; that was when we still had a democracy, instead of our present plutocracy. Hand grenades were off limits as well; and as well they should be.

The ultimate cure for the present

gun violence is to take away the guns. That would be the sensible, reasonable, civilized, morally correct solution to the violence. Our present plutocracy, however, leaves the decision-making to the gun manufacturers.

A simple yea or nay vote by the electorate to disarm this country would most likely result in disarming. The 300 million guns in this nation are largely owned by 30 percent of the population. Since we have the most powerful military in the world, we no longer need a militia nor the right to bear arms.

Foolishly, gun advocates claim we were armed to fight the government. Really? Do they think our forefathers were that stupid?

MURRAY E. STANLEY JR.
Astoria

present on the Seaside, Cannon Beach and Gearhart beaches.

During the intervening 60 or so years, I have walked on Cape Cod’s beach in Massachusetts, New York’s Jones Beach and Fire Island, New Jersey’s Atlantic City, Florida’s Miami Beach and Fort Lauderdale, California’s San Francisco Beach, Pescadero Beach, Venice Beach and Hermosa Beach. I do not doubt that I have walked many more miles on beaches than has Love.

All of those beaches have been free, empty of commercial enterprises, and for the “exclusive use of the public,” whether or not “forever” is open to as much question as Love himself admits of Oregon’s beaches.

Love asks, unrhethorically, “You think a writer like me exists in Southern California, Florida or New Jersey?”

He answers his own question, “No.”

Of course not. What would be the need? Those states, and probably all other coastal states, have preserved dry sands areas for exclusive use by the public. Why doth Love protest so much?

LOUIS SARGENT
Gearhart

Respect Gearhart

Open letter to the Gearhart mayor and city council: We are concerned about the marked increase in recent years in short-term vacation rentals (STRs) and their largely negative impact on our community. The many problems include trash strewn everywhere, noise, rowdiness, inconsideration of nearby neighbors, boat trailers parked where they shouldn’t be, and all of the cars, for which there is insufficient parking, not to mention the stress placed on septic drain fields and on our water supply.

We bought our home in April 1996. The main attraction of Gearhart for us was that it was a quiet residential community. We knew there were long-ago established family vacation homes here that are an integral part of the history and fabric of our community. But as the Internet has made all things possible, Gearhart is now being pulled into the fray. That fabric is fraying.

The irony of all of this is that which is so desirable about Gearhart is the very thing that is at risk of being destroyed by the current overzealous creation of short-term rentals. Those who own these essentially commercial properties clearly and purposely sought out Gearhart for its neighborhood quality of life.

We’ll go further to say that these same owners would be alarmed if this were happening in their main home neighborhoods. They would be appalled, and up in arms about it. Who wants to live next to frequent transient activity going on? They’d be concerned about their standard of living, their quality of life — and rightfully so. We are simply asking that Gearhart be treated with the same respect as they would expect in their primary communities.

Item No. 4, page 1, of Ordinance 677, in the Gearhart Comprehensive Plan says: “The City will recognize the importance of the City’s residential neighborhoods and the need to protect them from the negative impacts of rental property, and to discourage increased levels of traffic and similar disruptions.” It’s all right there. We need to continue to hold to this standard.

If someone purchased a property with the sole intent of using it as a vacation rental, and

now needs those proceeds to pay the mortgage, that concern should not be foisted on the rest of Gearhart by way of leniency regarding STR existence or regulation. The community should not be held hostage and change governance to accommodate those poor investment decisions, which need zoning changes or other special consideration so that those investments could be solvent — not just solvent, but lucrative on the backs of their neighbors.

We look forward to a solution that is respectful of this very special spot on the North Coast, Gearhart.

WILSON AND JEANNE
MARK
Gearhart

Yes to methanol

I read with dismay the editorial “Why ruin our rivers for China’s rulers?” (*The Daily Astorian*, Sept. 28) and feel compelled to reply. It appears that *The Daily Astorian* did not fully research this issue, and missed some important facts.

Why build a methanol plant on the Columbia River in Columbia County? I’ll give you three reasons:

1. Jobs. This facility would be a \$1.8 billion investment in

Columbia County. It would create 1,000 construction jobs and approximately 200 permanent, family-wage jobs. These jobs would be a tremendous benefit for many residents in our county, which has an unemployment rate of 7.5 percent.

2. Climate Change. The reason China is converting its olefins manufacturing from an oil-and coal-based system to a natural gas-to-methanol system? Because it is better for the environment, reducing greenhouse gases and toxic wastes significantly.

Don’t we want China, the world’s leading manufacturing nation, to do more to protect the environment? And the idea that China will use the methanol just to make “dollar store junk” is not true. In reality, methanol is used to make many everyday products, from the carpet in your house to the windshield washer fluid in your car.

3. Value-added manufacturing. This isn’t an energy project, and it’s not the exporting of raw materials that some claim it to be. Northwest Innovation Works (NWIW) will build a value-added manufacturing facility — the kind that the state of Oregon wants to encourage. Whether we create computer chips, wood products or methanol, manufac-

turing creates good paying jobs that we want in Oregon.

The Columbia River has always been an integral part of our economic growth and quality of life in Columbia County. Do we need to protect that asset? Of course, and that’s why we have strict regulatory and permitting processes in place.

The reality is, we have less commercial traffic on the river today than we did 20 years ago, and many jobs have disappeared from the region. We can have both economic development and good environmental stewardship — we don’t have to choose one over the other.

The NWIW facility is good for our county and for northwest Oregon

CHUCK DAUGHTRY
Executive director, Columbia
County Economic Team
St. Helens

Get some backbone

Open letter to Mayor Dianne Widdop, the City Council, the Planning Commission, City Administrator Chad Sweet, and city of Gearhart residential property owners:

The time to enforce existing city codes and zoning ordinances which support the comprehensive plan for the city of

Gearhart is long past due. The argument that laws do not exist to regulate short term rental activity within the city is ill founded, as stated in my legal brief, presented to Sweet dated Aug. 22, 2011. Ordinances do exist, it just takes backbone to enforce them.

City officials owe residential property owners — who invested in the low-density, single-family zoned real estate claimed in the comprehensive plan — the simple sanctity of enforcing city zoning ordinances and city code, which keeps their neighborhood livable and safe.

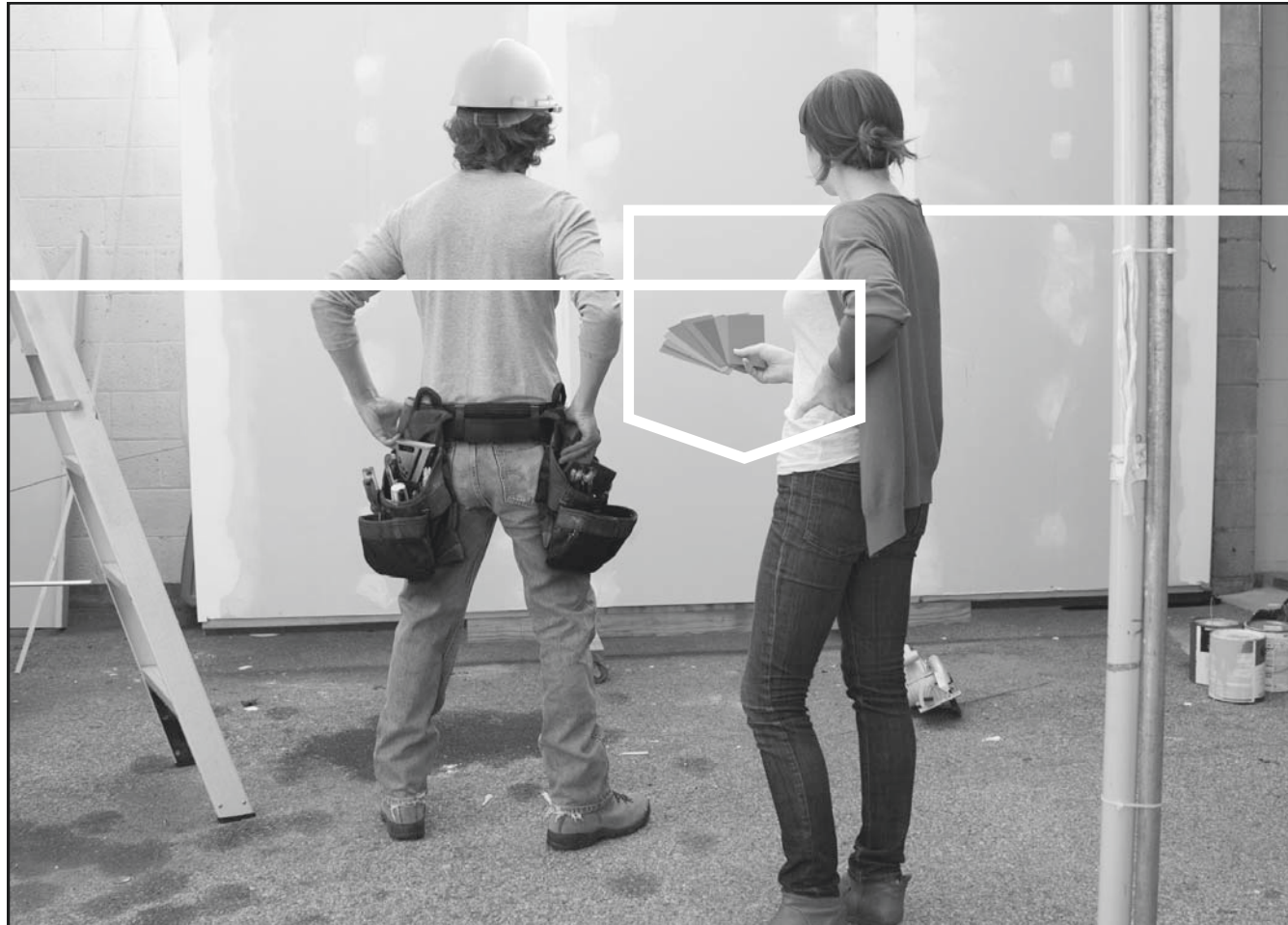
If city officials prefer to claim that existing regulations do not exist, then city officials owe it to the people to adopt specific regulations which preserve the livability of what they claim is “rural atmosphere,” as stated in the comprehensive plan. This is not an issue for discussion between real estate tycoons and residential property owners, this is a right granted to property owners by the city when they invested in single family homes.

The term “follow the money” is playing out in Gearhart, where city officials are in over their heads and in some cases ill-qualified for the position into which they have been placed. Gearhart is Mayberry, without the logic, common sense and backbone of an Andy Griffith to maintain the charm of the city.

It takes only one city official in the right position to realize he or she has courage and backbone to make a city become, and remain, what its laws promise. Look to Lincoln City, and city after city down the Oregon coast, to see how city officials with courage stood up for the rights of residential property owners by not only adopting strict regulations of short term, transient rentals, but also enforcing those regulations, thereby maintaining at least some of the promise they made to residential property owners.

Gearhart, live up to your potential. Adopt regulation now. Enforce those regulations in the future.

NICHOLAS P. BAKER
Gearhart



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