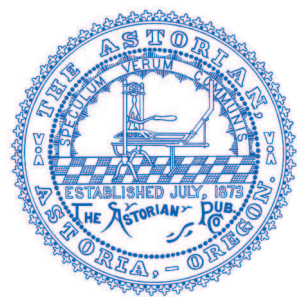


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW

We need to preserve services for our seniors

There aren't many options for local people in need of skilled convalescent care for themselves or loved ones. For many years, Clatsop Care Center was widely regarded in the region as not just a good option, but one in which the community could take pride and comfort. Its fall from that position is something that should concern us all and spur serious action.

On the lengthy list of looming disasters Americans worry about — everything from asteroid collisions to Yellowstone blowing up — a realistic one we usually ignore is the quickly accelerating avalanche of elder issues confronting the nation as the Baby Boom generation transitions into retirement. This age cohort of more than 75 million people will require vastly more in the way of services than are currently available.

Particularly in relatively rural areas like ours, residents already confront difficult choices. An accident or ailment can hit individuals and their children with an immediate dilemma of how and where to recover, how to pay for it and what to do next. On a broader societal level, we have to wrestle with the best ways to nurture our most experienced citizens, both as a matter of simple decency and because lack of adequate provision for senior care can be economically crippling. It is a sad occasion when long-term residents feel compelled to relocate because they perceive a need to seek out better care in their final years.

Clatsop County can count itself as extremely fortunate to have the health care system we do, led by Columbia Memorial Hospital and its collaboration with Oregon Health & Science University, and by Providence Seaside Hospital and its networking with the larger Providence system.

Our Friday story, "Bringing Clatsop Care Center back from the brink," found a starkly different situation with regard to convalescent care. A dwindling number of patients — from more than 70 to 24 or fewer — is a warning sign we can't ignore.

Have efforts to control financial deficits hurt the standard of care, leading potential patients to seek any option they can find? Is maintaining an aging building, in light of external factors such as cuts to Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements, simply more than Astoria and surrounding communities can afford? Is it ever going to be possible to maintain staffing levels and retain well-qualified personnel in a county with few people looking for work?

Clatsop Care's problems aren't unique: These issues and others encapsulate elder-care conundrums nationwide.

Unlike many places, however, we are in a position to make a real difference in how this downward spiral ends. Clearly, board members of Clatsop Care Health District need active community engagement in helping craft a workable path back to health for this vital service. Planned steps like selling the building and farming out management functions would benefit from fresh eyes.

Columbia Memorial's smart model of strategic independence coupled with strong outside partnerships is one that Clatsop Care — and indeed every small-town institution — should study. Creative and community-focused leadership can find a path forward.

We need to be thinking of ways to incubate additional services for senior citizens, not losing any of those we now possess. Citizens need to sit up and get involved in this. Any one of us — or our parents or spouses — could desperately need Clatsop Care tomorrow.

We need to be thinking of ways to incubate additional services for senior citizens, not losing any of those we now possess. Citizens need to sit up and get involved in this.



GUEST COLUMN

Our wounded warriors deserve better tax break



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Michael Murphy, a veteran who served in the U.S. Army, leaves the Disabled American Veterans van at his dropoff point in St. Helens last year.

By STEPHEN BATES
Special to The Daily Astorian

For almost 100 years, Oregon has honored its wounded warriors, our disabled veterans with a property tax exemption. At

one time, research shows, this exemption was over 100% of the value of a median single family dwelling in Oregon. This is fitting, as our wounded warriors have given a portion of their body; a part of their being in the service of our country.

But, this exemption has been reduced to less than 10% of the value of a median priced single family home. This is an unfortunate result of not reviewing old laws and updating them to meet current needs.

The original Oregon law that authorizes this property tax exemption references Civil War disabled veterans and their surviving spouses. This demonstrates our state's long-standing commitment to our disabled veterans. This law has been modified only a few times since 1953.

When real estate values started escalating in the late 1970s, the disabled veterans property tax exemption started to dwindle. The exemption amounts remained the same, while the assessed valuation of properties grew. The amount of exemp-

tion became less and less. The statute controlling the amount of the disabled veteran property tax exemption was not updated during the time that property values soared in the 1980s and 1990s.

Over the past several years, there have been attempts to correct this situation. But, it appears that politicians decided not to maintain a reasonable property tax exemption for our wounded warriors.

They made a sacrifice for all of us. We must make sure they are appropriately honored.

The 2005 Legislature did make some amends. A 3% annual increase was added to the disabled veterans property tax exemption. A disabled veteran inferred in a 2015 testimony that the 3% increase would not even buy a dinner for two. In other words, this is not enough.

What was once 100% is now less than 10%.

Do we still care about our disabled veterans? They made a sacrifice for all of us. We must make sure they are appropriately honored.

Because political sentiment identifies that a 100% exemption would be too costly, Senate Bill 694 is a compromise. The end result of passing this bill is that most disabled veterans qualifying for this exemption would receive a property tax exemption closer to 25% of the value of a median priced home in Oregon.

This bill also addresses the severely disabled veteran. It creates a new category that would allow an even greater property tax exemption if certain requirements are met. Senate Bill 694 gives the local county commission the option to control the levels of this exemption.

It will not be 100%. But 25% is better than 10%. This is a compromise that should be nonpartisan. Senate Bill 694 is doing something. Previous legislative sessions have come and gone and the politicians did nothing. Something is better than nothing.

Let Oregon once again stand for our wounded warriors. Let us increase the Disabled Veteran Property Tax Exemption this year. Let us work with our state legislators to pass Senate Bill 694.

Stephen Bates, a retired businessman, is a 40 year resident of Boring. He served as the chairman of the Boring Community Planning Organization and is currently chairman of the Committee on Memorials and Remembrance, an organization that addresses various issues for veterans.

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian. We do not publish open letters or third-party letters.

Letters should be fewer than 350 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone numbers. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy and verbal verification of authorship. Only two letters per writer are printed each month.

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. Discourse 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.

The Daily Astorian welcomes short "in gratitude" notes from readers for publication. They should keep to a 200-word maximum and writers are asked to avoid simply listing event sponsors. They

must be signed, include the writer's address, phone number and are subject to condensation and editing for style, grammar, etc.

Submissions may be sent in any of these ways:

E-mail to editor@dailyastorian.com;

Online form at www.dailyastorian.com;

Delivered to the Astorian offices at 949 Exchange St. and 1555 N. Roosevelt in Seaside.

Or by mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103