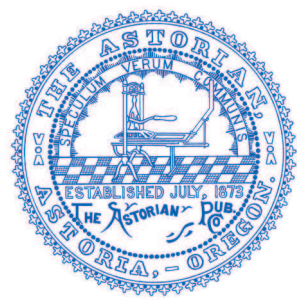


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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OUR VIEW

Firings show more of Brown's leadership flaws

In a move that defies both logic and comprehension, Gov. Kate Brown abruptly fired three members of the state Environmental Quality Commission last week.

This is the latest episode of the governor's meddling in the business of a supposedly independent state commission.

State Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, had it right when he said, "We cannot have the governor of our beautiful state firing Senate-confirmed volunteer members of a commission, simply because they don't do what she wants them to do."

Legally, a governor has the authority to fire political appointees, including commission members. But such actions should be exceedingly rare and must be fully explained. Oregonians deserve that, especially given Brown's professed commitment to transparency.

Nothing about her action makes sense. That includes the press release issued by her office on Wednesday.

It announced her appointment of three new members to the Environmental Quality Commission, thanked the three departing members, avoided saying they had been fired, and gave no clue to her reasoning — including why she kept two members.

But the political infighting seems to come down to the commission's recent hiring of Richard Whitman to head the state Department of Environmental Quality, an agency that has endured rough times. Whitman is a former aide to Brown and Gov. John Kitzhaber, and a former director of the state Department of Land Conservation and Development. He served as acting DEQ director so it is not surprising that the commission unanimously gave him the permanent job after conducting a national search.

Brown's staff said she was dissatisfied with the selection process — that it took too long and was insufficiently "collaborative" with the Governor's Office. Yet they said Brown had confidence in Whitman's abilities.

The first part of the governor's concern may highlight a flaw in the hiring process — that independent commissions and semi-autonomous agencies, which abound in state government, might lack the expertise and resources to adequately manage top-level hiring. That concern deserves a close look by the Legislature during the final three months of the session.

But the question of "collaboration" is deeply troubling. State law clearly says that the governor shall appoint the commission members, the state Senate shall decide whether to confirm those appointments, and the commission shall appoint the DEQ director.

Given that Whitman is in place and Brown professes confidence in him, why now sack a majority of the commissioners?

The ousted commissioners say it's because Brown did not want them to appoint Whitman. They also say that Brown was late in making her desires known.

Even if those allegations are only partially true, they raise serious questions about how much involvement a governor should have in a supposedly independent commission.

Brown has been at odds with the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission over gillnetting in the Columbia River. She also defied her fellow members of the State Land Board in ordering the Division of State Lands to create a plan for keeping the Elliott State Forest in public ownership. As in this latest instance, her rationale was not fully explained.

The trend is disturbing.

Oregonians have wanted stronger leadership from Gov. Brown. But her sacking of three environmental quality commissioners smacks of retribution, not leadership.



AP Photo/Don Ryan
Gov. Kate Brown speaks to media representatives in Salem in January. Brown dismissed three of the five members of the Environmental Quality Commission Wednesday.

Legally, a governor has the authority to fire political appointees, including commission members. But such actions should be exceedingly rare and must be fully explained.



GUEST COLUMN

Foster care is where miracles can happen

By JULIA MABRY
Special to The Daily Astorian

We have some terrible child abuse statistics in our community. These statistics are not terrible in comparison to the rest of Oregon. That is one analytical measure. But they are terrible because it is not possible to have a "good" child abuse statistic.

More than 120 children experienced abuse or neglect in 2016 in Clatsop County, and every year in our county, approximately one in 72 children will become a ward of the state, having endured abuse and neglect.

This is terrible for each child, each family, and for our community; every child matters. The kids who make up these numbers worried about mom getting hurt by her partner. They waited for their dad to sober up enough to get food. They watched their caregiver push a needle through her arm to get high. They were afraid to go home after school. They were buckled into a car seat, waiting for someone, anyone to pick them up.

One-hundred twenty children sounds like a lot, and when I mention this number to people they are shocked. Then I have to clarify that 120 is not the real number of children who endured traumas we don't wish on anyone. It's only the number of children for whom reports of abuse were made, and for whom neither mom nor dad was available to parent, so that the state took over parenting duties and placed them in foster care.

The true numbers of abuse and neglect are unknown and undoubtedly even more heartbreaking. We are growing a large population of traumatized children right here at home.

But this is also true: we have amazing citizens who provide temporary refuge to those children. Foster care is where miracles happen. In my three years with the Clatsop CASA Program, I have seen it again and again, and every time I am grateful and amazed. A deaf child learns to sign to communicate. A child attends school regularly and — surprise! — actually learns. A baby plumps up with enough food. Teeth get fixed. A child, very slowly, learns to trust that someone will be there when he wakes up, every single day.

Those are the daily miracles that happen in the aftermath of child abuse and neglect. Children can get better, and they do. So can their parents, and they also often do.

I am in awe of the foster fam-



Submitted Drawing

More than 120 children experienced abuse and neglect in Clatsop County last year.

We are growing a large population of traumatized children right here at home.

ilies whose human capacity for love and tenacity helps those children get better. Twenty-four families currently provide a home for nonrelative children in our county. They foster children who will likely only be in their lives for a short time. They risk loving them anyway, knowing that they will have to let them go. Thirty more families foster their nieces, nephews and grandkids. They do the daily, difficult work of caring for someone else's children. Our children.

Yes, we have some terrible child abuse statistics in Clatsop County. Yet when we worry about numbers, percentages and comparisons, we miss the human side of child abuse. We detach and look for someone to blame. What we

should worry about is this: what are we going to do about it? How will we ensure that parents learn to parent, have an opportunity to become sober and safe, have a way to deal with their own traumas and mental health problems? How do we lend a hand, instead of pointing a finger?

Any one of us can be part of a child's safety net and family's support system, be it through foster care, volunteering at the schools, or cleaning up a playground. Children are our future. We owe it to them and to ourselves to make it a good one.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month and Sexual Assault Awareness Month. You can show your support for prevention at an upcoming community walk on April 18th at 5 p.m. at The Baked Alaska Annex in Astoria. A blue pinwheel garden, representing the healthy, carefree, happy childhood we want for all children, is traveling around the county during the month of April. For other activities, please visit Clatsop CASA Program on Facebook.

Julia Mabry is the executive director of the Clatsop CASA Program Inc.

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