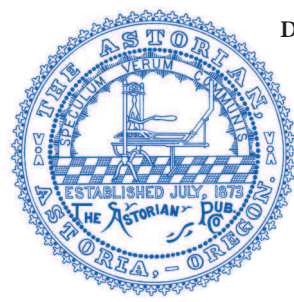


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Developer Harry Henke is behind the development of the 87-lot subdivision known as Reed Ranch off U.S. Highway 101 near Seaside.

Projects could take a large bite out of housing crunch

The welcome news of planned developments in Warrenton and Astoria have the potential of taking a large bite out of the region's housing crunch.

In Warrenton, as we reported last week, developers have plans in the pipeline for more than 500 housing units in various locations, while in Astoria a 32-unit apartment complex is being proposed for property near the Old Youngs Bay Bridge. Additionally, there are 170 lots in development in the county outside city limits.

Developers of the projects in cities and the county will still need various approvals to go forward once their plans are fully considered, and whether it takes a large bite out of the housing crunch will also depend on pricing once the homes and apartments are built and whatever NIMBY opposition those plans may face from other residents beforehand.

According to Warrenton's planning director, Skip Urling, the projects there range from Fort Pointe, a large development that could add up to 150 homes and a matching number of apartments along Ridge Road south of the KOA campground, to other smaller subdivisions and apartment complexes. Fort Pointe's Texas-based development group was originally given tentative approval for the project a decade ago, but because of the sour economy it was shelved. The group has renewed its interest, Urling said.

Elsewhere in Warrenton, developer Harry Henke plans to build an 87-unit subdivision between Sunset Lake and U.S. Highway 101. Warrenton Fiber and North River Homes are jointly planning a 74-unit development south of the Clatsop County Sheriff's Office and the Nygaard family's earlier development, Forrest Rim, which has been mostly built out. An additional 35-unit subdivision being planned by developer Dick Krueger is scheduled to break ground at a Lewis and Clark site next month.

In Astoria, the owner of the Fisher Building, developer Joe Barnes, is planning the 32-unit apartment complex that would consist of three separate three-story buildings. The complex would be built on property near the old Yacht Club offices, the location of the city's Parks and Recreation Department, according to city staff.

Astoria Community Development Director Kevin Cronin calls housing the "monster" problem in the city right now, and each of the cities on the North Coast are experiencing housing shortages in varying degrees. Economists and business leaders have pointed to a lack of rental housing, in particular, as a barrier to economic growth.

No doubt that some of the projects will draw opposition, and city councilors in those areas need to take that in consideration when the full plans are submitted.

If they are to truly tackle the housing issue, though, they must also have the political will to stand in the way of the "Not In My Back Yard" type of opposition to developments that may otherwise be up to spec. Councilors in Seaside recently did so in approving a housing development there, and it bears watching because these projects will test the mettle of other leaders in the two cities and the county.



No doubt that some of the projects will draw opposition, and city councilors in those areas need to take that in consideration when the full plans are submitted.



McConnell's health care misery

By FRANK BRUNI

New York Times News Service

For a good laugh, or rather cry, zip backward to the beginning of 2014, when Democrats still had control of the U.S. Senate, and listen to Mitch McConnell's lamentations about the way they were doing business.



"Major legislation is now routinely drafted not in committee but in the majority leader's conference room," he declaimed on the Senate floor. "Bills should go through committee." He pledged that if Republicans were "fortunate enough to gain the majority next year, they would."

In a speech a few months later at the American Enterprise Institute, he said, "The greatest way to ensure stability in our laws is to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate in some way in the passage." He railed about the lack of transparency from Democrats and the damage they'd done "to the spirit of comity and respect that the public has every right to expect from their leaders."

"If Republicans were fortunate enough to reclaim the majority in November, I assure you, my friends, all of this would change," he vowed anew.

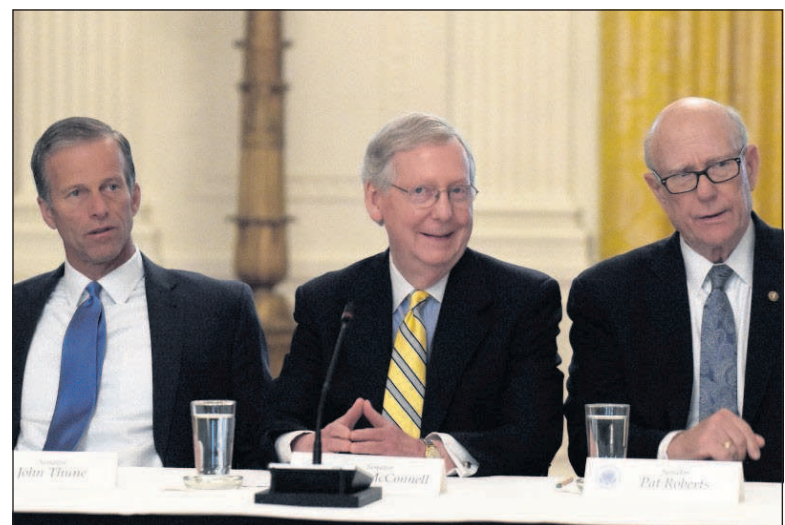
Republicans were fortunate enough. McConnell became the majority leader. And if you can find committee hearings, transparency, full participation, comity, respect or anything akin to good faith in the way he just tried to ram his health care bill through the chamber, then I want you on the hunt for the yeti and, pretty please, the Fountain of Youth.

His approach may prove fatal: On Tuesday, he had to postpone any vote on the legislation until after July 4.

Then again, perhaps he isn't really chasing success. One intriguing theory is that he has no yen for stripping insurance from tens of millions of Americans and having it come back to bite Republicans. But he must go convincingly through the motions, lest President Donald Trump mewl and right-wing donors carp that he isn't seizing his best chance to drive a stake through Obamacare's heart.

Whatever the case, it's a sorry turn for a man who paid such lip service to the courtesy and collaboration that supposedly distinguished the Senate, which he did, in his way, seem to revere.

Unlike more telegenic colleagues, he never yearned to be president. He aspired to recognition as a master of the world's "greatest deliberative body," as the Senate is often described.



AP Photo/Susan Walsh

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, center, flanked by Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., left, and Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., right, wait for President Donald Trump to join a meeting of Republican senators on health care in the East Room of the White House Tuesday.

But since Trump's inauguration, that body has been a sort of couch potato, slow to rouse to its rightful labors. Committees aren't busily marking up bills.

And what McConnell has displayed isn't mastery so much as bullying. Bye-bye to the 60 votes needed to proceed to confirmation of a Supreme Court nominee. He did away with that to smooth Neil Gorsuch's passage.

they made of all this. Both mourned a long, steady erosion of bipartisanship that McConnell hardly owns.

"I actually think he's done as well as he could with the cards he's been dealt," the Republican, Judd Gregg, told me, saying that McConnell is no doubt correct in his assumption that Democrats aren't eager to work with him. They're too consumed by contempt for Trump.

The Democrat, Bob Kerrey, characterized McConnell as a "creature of these very partisan times" who in some ways merely reflects them. But Kerrey said that when McConnell blocked any vote on President Barack Obama's nomination of Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court for the better part of a year, "he went way too far."

Until now, McConnell has evaded the degree of demonization that you might expect. He's too pale a blur to arouse passion, and as an object of fascination, he can hold neither bow nor arrow to the dimpled deer hunter who reigns over the other side of the Capitol.

The tote board of House Speaker Paul Ryan's hypocrisies is more painstakingly maintained, and during the 2016 campaign, every step of his tango with Trump was scrutinized to smithereens. McConnell receded. He was the Jan Brady to Ryan's Marcia.

But he has always been the ruthless one. In 2010, when he was the minority leader, he stated unabashedly that Republicans' pre-eminent goal was to send Obama packing after one term.

Harry Reid, a Democrat, was then the majority leader, and after he eliminated the filibuster for all executive branch nominations apart from those for the Supreme Court, McConnell said, "I think it's a time to be sad about what's been done to the United States Senate."

It was. But because of McConnell, it's a time now to be sadder still.

I asked two former senators, a Republican and a Democrat, what they made of all this. Both mourned a long, steady erosion of bipartisanship that McConnell hardly owns.

Farewell to deliberation. McConnell did away with that, too. Back when the Senate considered Obamacare, there were scores of hearings and exhaustive analyses of the evolving legislation's text. McConnell held no hearings for his bill. He spurned feedback from outside groups. An uncomely cabal of 13 men patched it together in the equivalent of a subterranean bunker, with the initial hope of a vote just a week after they emerged from hiding and brought it into the light.

I asked two former senators, a Republican and a Democrat, what

WHERE TO WRITE

• **U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D):** 2338 Rayburn HOB, Washington, D.C., 20515. Phone: 202-225-0855. Fax 202-225-9497. District office: 12725 SW Millikan Way, Suite 220, Beaverton, OR 97005. Phone: 503-469-6010. Fax 503-326-5066. Web: bonamici.house.gov/
• **U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D):** 313 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-3753. Web: www.merkley.senate.gov
• **U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D):** 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510. Phone: 202-224-5244. Web: www.wyden.

senate.gov

• **State Rep. Brad Witt (D):** State Capitol, 900 Court Street N.E., H-373, Salem, OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1431. Web: www.leg.state.or.us/witt/ Email: rep.bradwitt@state.or.us

• **State Rep. Deborah Boone (D):** 900 Court St. N.E., H-481, Salem, OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1432. Email: rep.deborah_boone@state.or.us District office: P.O. Box 928, Cannon Beach, OR 97110. Phone: 503-986-1432. Web: www.leg.state.or.us/boone/
• **State Sen. Betsy Johnson (D):**

State Capitol, 900 Court St. N.E., S-314, Salem, OR 97301. Telephone: 503-986-1716. Email: sen.betsyjohnson@state.or.us Web: www.betsyjohnson.com District Office: P.O. Box R, Scappoose, OR 97056. Phone: 503-543-4046. Fax: 503-543-5296. Astoria office phone: 503-338-1280.

• **Port of Astoria:** Executive Director, 10 Pier 1 Suite 308, Astoria, OR 97103. Phone: 503-741-3300. Email: admin@portofastoria.com

• **Clatsop County Board of Commissioners:** c/o County Manager, 800 Exchange St., Suite 410, Astoria, OR 97103. Phone: 503-325-1000.