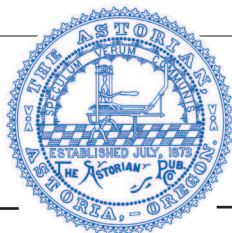


# OPINION

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## OUR VIEW

# Mending the errors of bygone polluters

Astoria is justifiably proud of its industrial heritage. Canneries and an intricate network of related support businesses once crowded the waterfront during the salmon equivalent of a gold rush. This evolved for a time in the mid-20th century into a more diversified maritime economy sparked by World War II.

Now, much of the shoreline has morphed again, away from heavy industry toward hospitality. Another large hotel was announced last week.

This transition and the simple passage of time are bringing to light an unpleasant aftertaste of the industrial boom: An oily sheen on some adjacent waters from old tanks, pipes and tainted sediments. Sorting this out is worth the effort.

A dilapidated pier next to Cannery Pier Hotel collapsed in January and damaged a tank underneath filled with oil once used to fire Union Fishermen's Cooperative Packing Co.'s retorts. Cleanup costs quickly escalated to \$1 million. In a related development, last week we reported the state Department of Environmental Quality is nearing a decision on the best way to clean up historical petroleum pollution at the Port of Astoria's central waterfront near the hotel's site, which the Port owned until 1999. Farther away, in Jeffers Garden on the Lewis and Clark River, Astoria Marine Construction Co. could be doomed by a costly, state-mandated cleanup of legacy contamination.

Until at least the 1970s, policies regarding

buried petroleum toxins could be best described as "out of sight, out of mind." There was a fuzzy awareness that oil-handling practices by earlier operators had been sloppy at best and, at times, deliberately intended to minimize costs at the expense of neighbors and the estuarine environment. Stricter laws designed to protect people, fish and animals gradually brought such negligence to an end.

Nowadays in Clatsop County, there's a consensus that pollution control is a worthwhile goal in its own right, along with awareness that prosperity is closely linked to a reputation for stewardship of our land and waters. We definitely don't want to become known as the pretty place that allows gunky old oil to seep into the waters where salmon swim.

Dealing with all this is easy to encourage but harder to pay for. Current property owners, Port officials and possibly lenders and insurers are caught up in mending the errors of bygone polluters.

In passing a resolution to cooperate in the Cannery Pier Hotel cleanup, the Port of Astoria Commission took a valuable leadership position in aiding with widespread local waterfront pollution. "This is an opportunity for our organization, through the commission, to proclaim support for our neighbors when our neighbors are in distress," Port Executive Director Jim Knight said. "This is our opportunity to proclaim our ability

to come and help manage the process when identifying who are the responsible parties, and what will ultimately be their fair share, with the guidance and support of the Coast Guard."

The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, the Astoria City Council and state Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, also all appear to recognize the importance of this issue and the need for some degree of unity in addressing it.

Although it has many of its own pressing matters to deal with beyond oil contamination, it's possible the Port could play a useful and even profitable role in acting as lead agency for a consortium working toward solutions on behalf of Astoria. This would mark an historic and symbolic turnaround from its own troubles a dozen years ago, when a previous Port manager got into a legal tangle with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for mishandling dredged materials containing the now-banned pesticide DDT. Then as now, the Port and its personnel were blameless when it came to depositing the pollution in the first place.

Fixing environmental sins of the past requires careful thought, expert guidance and as much outside funding as we can wrangle. A key asset for the entire Pacific Northwest, the Columbia River shoreline deserves and requires high-priority treatment for lingering ailments that trace their origins to times when Astoria helped feed and defend the nation.

An oil spill near Cannery Pier Hotel is a reminder of the risks of Astoria's industrial past.

Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian



## GUEST COLUMN

# Yes, you can do something about the direction we are going

It is easy to become frustrated with the direction of our town, county, state or nation. Seasoned observers lament that money has too great an influence and things will never change. More recent observers don't understand why elected officials just don't do the right thing regardless of the pressures.

Is there anything you, the individual citizen, can do to change the course we are on? Yes, there is. It is to become a precinct committee person within your political party.

As a precinct committee person, also called a PCP, you represent the people in your precinct with the responsibility to define, organize and coordinate

the grassroots effort around the issues of concern to you and your neighbors. This is an elective position and the May 15 primary elections will include ballot choices for PCPs throughout Clatsop County. To get on the ballot, interested citizens must submit their application to the Clatsop County Elections division by March 6. The application form can be found at [sos.oregon.gov/elections/Documents/SEL105.pdf](http://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Documents/SEL105.pdf).

Each precinct is allocated male and female PCP positions based upon the number of registered party members living in that precinct. All parties registered in a county are eligible to have PCPs. For example, in Astoria's precinct 47, there are five male and five female PCP positions for the county Democratic party because of the large number of registered Democrats in that precinct. And yes, Oregon law specifies PCP positions by gender.

The PCP can be the starting point for enacting change, because the PCP is a key part of how parties are organized. The state of Oregon laws on political party structure say that PCPs are the voting members of their party's county leadership committee. As such, they can bring their issues to the party and begin moving issues forward for broader consideration.

The PCP has the power to vote on the leadership of the party, set its direction and determine its priorities. For example, as a representative of a precinct, a PCP can bring forward neighborhood concerns about affordable housing and then band together with other PCPs with a similar perspective to seek consensus on an approach. With this broader base of support the issue can be expressed to elected officials with the back-

ing of the party.

There is another power given to a party's PCPs. The precinct committee persons from the party holding an elective office nominate replacements to fill unexpired terms when a position is vacated before the next regularly scheduled election. The slate of three to five PCP-chosen people goes to the county commissions in that district, who have the ultimate authority to fill the open seat. This is not as uncommon as you might think, giving PCPs a special role when unexpected openings arise.

So why is being a PCP any more effective in inducing change than expressing your opinion through letters to the editor or speaking at city council meetings? The truth is that for democracy to work, all those options are needed. As a PCP, you may learn of issues through the media or public meeting attendance. It is what you do with that knowledge that sets the PCP apart.

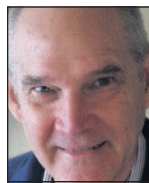
PCPs are the eyes and ears of the political community. The large number of voices they represent brings legitimacy to a political party's issues. The debate at the party level refines issues through the fire of discussion. As an active member of their neighborhood, they are already hearing what others have to say about local issues.

Does this sound like too much work? You don't have the time? True, it can be hard work and it will take time. But recognize that the actions you are upset about or the laws you disagree with were worked hard over a long period of time by someone else to get where they are today. No one said making change would be easy.

Becoming a PCP can also be a stepping stone to higher office. By building relationships in your neighborhood and party, you are building a network for your ideas. Learning the process as a PCP exposes you to the workings of a body like a city council, transportation district, county commission, fire district or state office, should your interests go in that direction.

But the first step is to become the precinct committee person for your neighborhood. Take the time to download the application form, fill it out and submit it to the county. Then tell your friends to vote for you. This is a good way to do something about the direction we are going. If someone has ever told you that you should run for office, now is your chance. Become a PCP and bring your perspectives into the process.

*Bryan Kidder is communications director for the Clatsop County Democratic Central Committee.*



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