

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Bus system marks significant milestone

The Sunset Empire Transportation District is celebrating a quarter-century of service to the North Coast community.

That astonishing milestone is a testimony to the founders of the organization, who saw a need for a publicly financed bus system in the early 1990s and worked to make it happen.

The system grew from small, private routes which operated without a public subsidy. Knappa mink farmer Jack Davies ran a bus system in Astoria in the 1980s and Robert Brown operated a small, dilapidated bus between Astoria and Seaside. In 1991, the Clatsop County Commission convened a task force and two years later the board voted to create a new countywide transportation district using a state transit grant as seed money. By 1999, Sunset Empire had taken over all public transportation services in the county.

Many residents of Clatsop County who jump into their cars or pickups to drive across town may not think that bus service is a priority. But for people who don't own cars, especially students attending Clatsop Community College, or those who work some distance from home, the bus is vital for them to carry out their daily lives.

Leaders of the transit system are deservedly celebrating the milestone and are due a pat on the back. But they are not resting on their laurels by any

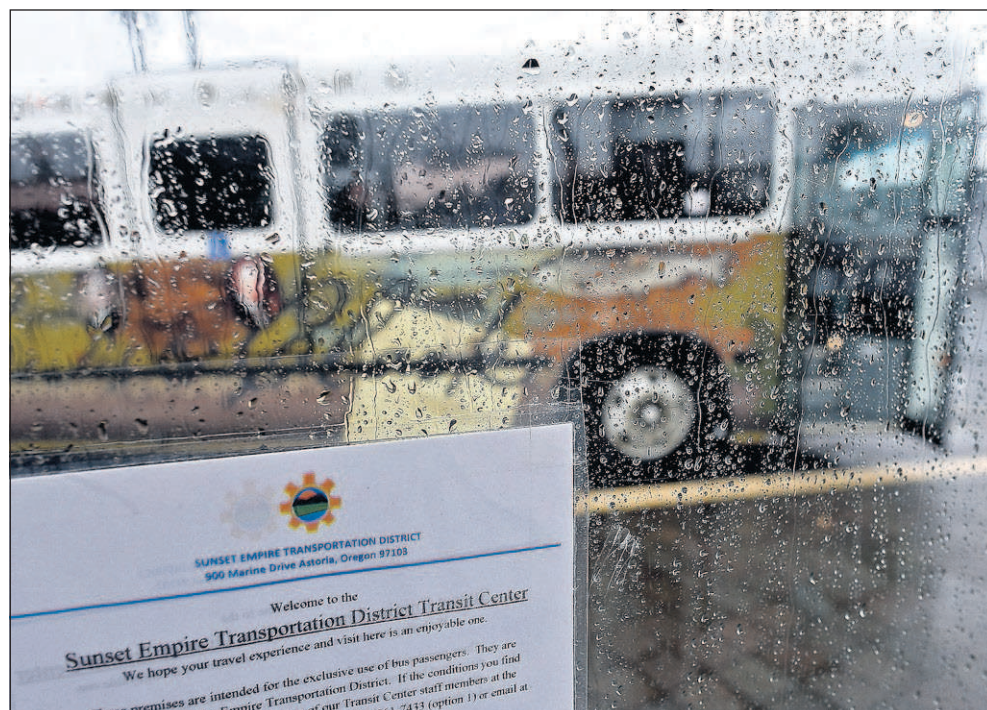
means. Executive Director Jeff Hazen and his team continue to enhance operations to make the service more efficient and friendly to riders.

One of the most important facets of the transit system is the manner in which it links in with neighboring counties, in part through the Northwest Connector program. Leaders recognize that jurisdictional boundaries simply don't matter to passengers who might travel across the Astoria Bridge from Pacific County in Washington state, change buses at the Astoria Transit Center, then head inland through Columbia County or down the Oregon Coast to Tillamook.

The transit center in central Astoria is an ideal location for travelers to link in with the Northwest Point buses, which offer a handy and reasonably priced alternative to driving to Portland to enjoy the city, link up with Amtrak trains or Greyhound buses, or take convenient Max connections to the Portland International Airport and beyond.

Our transit system's operations

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Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

A Sunset Empire bus sits waiting for passengers at the transit center in Astoria.

made headlines of the wrong kind in 2011 when a manager's personal difficulties prompted her departure and a major overhaul in the manner in which the agency's finances were handled. Additionally, changes in the board lineup since then have been instrumental in settling things down.

A 2016 long-range planning report spearheaded by Hazen was a blueprint for growth. One key was recognition of the need to provide much-needed, reliable service for people working in tourism industry jobs in Seaside and Cannon Beach who could not find affordable housing in those communities and needed to commute from Warrenton and

Hammond. Another was to begin planning to predict workers' and shoppers' transit needs when the Walmart store opens in Warrenton.

The report noted that in each of the years between 2012 and 2014 there were more than 150,000 passengers on the fixed routes (this does not include people using the dial-a-ride service).

Whether you ride the bus every day or once or twice a year, it is an important part of the fabric of our community that we must never take for granted. It's a pleasure to join other agencies, organizations and individuals in saluting the Sunset Empire for marking this milestone.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Foster care problem must be addressed

I am writing to recognize the efforts of our community on behalf of children in foster care in Clatsop County. I recently attended the annual Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) fundraiser at the Bridgewater Bistro. I am familiar with the indispensable role played by the CASA volunteers, due to my 24 years representing both parents and children in the juvenile dependency system.

CASA volunteers advocate with dedication and love for these children, who must endure separation from parents and siblings for long periods of time. Judges and attorneys alike are grateful for the help provided by CASA.

That said, I would be remiss if I did not raise up the social workers and support staff at the Oregon Department of Human Services, Astoria branch, for their efforts, as well. We appreciate the selfless and compassionate efforts of these state workers.

That said, an audit by the Oregon Secretary of State's office flagged significant problems with the foster care program. There were 11,000 children in foster care in 2017. This report pointed out three areas of primary concern:

- Chronic management shortcomings.
- Chronic understaffing, burnout and high turnover.
- Too few foster placements, and struggles to retain existing foster home and foster parents.

If we are to invest in our children's future, and avoid more costly solutions to children who are abused and neglected, changes need to be made. Legislative oversight is critical, and increased funding ought to be considered. If elected as your state representative, I will dedicate myself to making changes to address this unfortunate foster care problem.

JOHN F. ORR
Democratic candidate for
Oregon House, District 32
Astoria

Vote Orr for state representative

I would like to encourage everyone to vote for John Orr to represent District 32 in the Oregon House of Representatives. I have known and worked alongside John for many years. John has been a resident of the county for 25 years.

John will do his research, find the facts, listen to the people, and make the best decision for us. John has years of training and experience in public speaking, negotiation, and problem solving. I know if John is voted to represent me in the House of Representatives he has my best interests.

ROBERT BURK
Hammond

Leave the elk alone

I am writing in reference to the article "Gearhart, Warrenton join forces against elk" (The Daily Astorian, March 22).

We have owned our home in Gearhart since 1994. In the intervening time, we have noticed an increasing number of elk in and around Gearhart. We believe this increase coincides with increasing development and loss of habitat. The elk are an indication of balance disrupted.

Please consider elk as displaced through no fault of their own. Human decisions regarding development apparently failed to take into account the plight of various fauna where their normal environment was bulldozed, paved, and otherwise rendered uninhabitable.

Currently we vote to leave the elk alone. Use education and fundraising to improve elk habitat and lure them away from towns and from people. Support land conservancy and green space throughways. Use herding dogs on the golf course. Be creative with the nuisance element of the elk. And don't minimize the tourist attraction.

Ultimately, we must hold the developers accountable for damages to the homeowners' landscaping, dangerous encounters with protective herd mentality, and general problems within the townscape. Do not discount the effect of the destruction of the elk environment that formerly held them in their usual quiet, forest habitat.

When developers, such as big box stores and the city of Warrenton Business Park, create the disruption to habitat, the remediation should be upon their shoulders and out of their pockets. And to feign surprise is disingenuous.

NANCY DOTY DRUMMOND
Gearhart

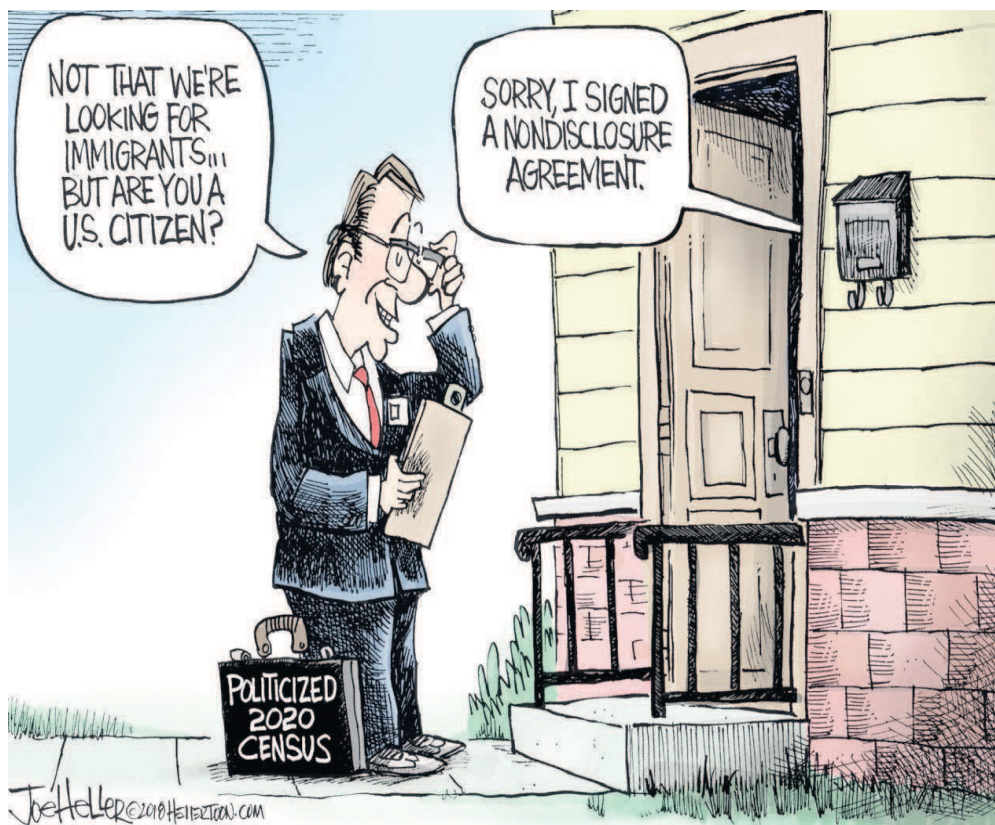
Please honor our beautiful ecosystem

Our group, Indivisible North Coast Oregon-Warrenton, is applying to the Adopt-a-Highway program as a means of public service.

While looking about for an available location to perform this service, I came upon two discarded mattresses by the side of the road, on U.S. Highway 101 near milepost 16, in view of passers-by and becoming waterlogged in our rains. Several authorities, county and state, were contacted about removing this debris. Because there was a debate on whose land (county or state) the mattresses lay, no removal took place.

Recology was called, and indicated that there would be a pickup fee plus a per item fee. Our group agreed to pay the fee, as the mattresses were such an unpleasant eyesore.

By the time Recology arrived to do the pickup, a third mattress had appeared. Recol-



ogy took the mattresses away and charged us for only the original quote. Recology is to be commended for their contribution to this event.

Please, please put your waste in the proper areas, recycle when you can, and honor this beautiful, fragile ecosystem in which we live.

CARRIE NYLAND
Warrenton

Limit private ownership of military weapons

The Second Amendment protects only the ownership of military-type weapons appropriate for use in "a well regulated militia." The only one I'm aware of is the National Guard, and I'm fine with them having military weapons, even fighter jets.

But isn't it reasonable to limit private ownership of weapons to those that are not primarily designed for the purpose of killing people? The Supreme Court ruled in 1939 that sawed-off shotguns are not protected. And, I think logic tells us that rapid-fire weapons with high-capacity magazines are not protected, either.

If you're going to jump up and down about your gun rights and the Second Amendment, you really have to include the whole thing, including "a well regulated militia." A bunch of loose guns running around in camouflage gear doesn't really fit the definition.

There are plenty of other gun choices to satisfy every wish for hunting, target shooting, and personal protection. Let's leave the killing machines to the military and National Guard.

I grew up in a tough neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. There were some bad

guys around the high school, and some had knives. But at that time, there were no guns. And no one was killed.

With fists or a knife you have to directly confront the person you intend to harm. With guns like those used in the awful school shootings in the past few years, the most craven coward can kill from a distance; randomly, efficiently, anonymously, and at no personal risk. Almost like a computer shooter game.

ROGER ROCKA
Astoria

What a privilege

Early on Sunday morning, following the crucifixion of Jesus, a small group of ladies approached the place where he had been buried. Their hearts were heavy. Many tears had been shed. Hope had vanished. In their minds he was dead. Now all they could do was show their love and respect by anointing his dead body with spices.

All of that quickly changed, for the grave was empty. An angel of the Lord delivered wonderful news, "Do not be afraid ... he is not here, for he has risen." That angel also instructed the ladies to go and share the good news. Tell others. Jesus is alive. (Matthew 28:1-8)

His resurrection indicates several important facts. He overcame Satan, just as he said he was. He is the Son of God. He overcame death. Thus, we know he can deliver all of his promises, including an eternal home in heaven for the faithful. Those ladies were selected to be the first to share that good news, but it's our privilege to do so as well.

KEN TIPPS
Astoria Church of Christ