

# OPINION

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# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

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## OUR VIEW

# In defense of patriotism

This nation started with a bang. It began with fighting words and we celebrate its birth every year with fireworks.

The Declaration of Independence, as it was soon known, laid down a brave vision for the United States. We were unified by the guiding principle that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were the rights of all people under God, and that a new country would be formed first and foremost to protect those rights.

We went to war for those ideals, throwing off a monarchy that believed it was the purveyor of God's divine will. We wrestled with how those rights should be interpreted in law and in government. Our forefathers went to great lengths to create a system that could be sustained and secured, even as competing interests would try to take it away or bend it to their will.

As we look back now — 242 years into this democratic experiment — it's amazing to see how much has worked. Our Constitution remains a garrison against government overreach and our checks and balances in the courts and the Congress have kept tyranny at bay.

It has failed on other fronts, historically, as we trampled or outright ignored the rights of marginalized people who stood in the way of those in power. And every day it is threatened by those who think the country



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is theirs, singularly, rather than ours, collectively.

But the reason it has worked as well as it has is because of patriots who have put the good of the country ahead of

themselves, even so far as laying down their lives and personal freedoms to protect it. They have shown with words and actions why this country's ideals are worth defending.

That's what patriotism does. It believes in the greater good of what the country stands for, and not merely the symbols that come along with it.

Nationalism, its dark cousin, demands homage to those symbols without respect for their underlying foundation — and it harbors suspicion and spite against those who understand those symbols differently.

Patriotism's power comes from a love of country and its people and ideals, while nationalism's power comes from a fear and hatred of the outside world.

Patriotism accepts past mistakes in hopes of building a better future. Nationalism ignores flaws, both past and present.

Patriotism inspires service to the country. Nationalism demands for allegiance to it.

Patriotism is more difficult. It is not merely waving a flag or reciting a pledge. It requires earnest attention, reflection and action. It requires good-faith debate about how our ideals should be practiced, and at the same time camaraderie in building a better country. It doesn't allow minor differences to separate the greater unity and progress.

And true patriotism should always be on guard for the creep of nationalism, so the two will still be distinguishable in years to come.

## GUEST COLUMN

# Hopeful, troubling developments on homelessness front

The Daily Astorian has published three timely and thought-provoking housing articles recently.

The first (and most hopeful of the three) describes a pronouncement by the Bornstein Seafood Company that a) it will raise its minimum wage to \$12 per hour, and b) the company has purchased an apartment building close to its processing plant, with the intent of making rooms available for employees.

On its face, this encouraging. It appears to be an advantage for fish processing workers, as well as a positive development toward stemming the tide of homeless people who have jobs on the North Coast. Not only is \$12 per hour well ahead of both state and federally required minimums, but housing — within walking distance to work — could be a fantastic employee benefit. But, before blithely congratulating Bornstein, such proposals should be judged on results and not intentions.

The Federal Labor Standards Act prescribes an hourly minimum pay rate of just \$7.25 (it has not been improved since 2009). Gov. Kate Brown signed into law a tiered plan in 2016 that has moved the Oregon minimum wage steadily upward (from \$9.25 to \$10.75) for Clatsop County. Bornstein's wage proposal, though a step in the right direction, is still 20 percent below what politicians and labor unions are lobbying for. Activists support minimum standards which enable full-time workers to afford basic necessities — \$15 per hour has become synonymous with a living wage.

Federal guidelines set 30 percent of personal income as the definition of what affordable housing costs (or should). At \$12 per hour, monthly rent of just \$625 is the limit of what could be reasonably regarded as affordable, no matter how convenient the newly purchased apartment building might be.

Many Bornstein employees work part-time. Even if a worker gets 40 hours, much of their workforce is employed only seasonally. So, I wonder how many affordable units there will be, as well as how many seafood employees may be eligible for a lengthy lease?

If any are eligible and rooms can be priced

affordably, but 63 percent of Americans are a \$500 financial surprise away from crisis, how does a seasonal worker afford first and last months' rent and a damage deposit?

### Rising rents a problem

The second article is far more troubling for those of us who are interested in ending the heartbreak and reversing this trend toward homelessness.

"Six months past the expiration of deed restrictions reserving one-fifth the units at the Emerald Heights Apartments for fixed or low-income tenants," complex owner Edita Smith has announced plans to make "major renovations" to 60 (of 300) units for the purpose of raising rents "closer to what the Astoria rentals' market will bear."

Previously regarded as affordable, the Emerald Heights Apartments are now home to a number of individuals and families who may not be able to afford to live in the complex at the new monthly market rates. And if, indeed, Emerald Heights is among Astoria's most affordable apartment houses (and vacancy rates among the other affordable rentals in the area are at or near zero availability), then where are 60 displaced Emerald Heights tenants to turn?

Entrepreneurs are entitled to a return on their investment. Landlords take risks on market price fluctuations and vacancies. They may not be directly responsible for the insurmountable gap between tenants' incomes and expenses.

But rising rents are a growing problem for workers. Their pensions are under assault and their bosses fail to pay living wages. They are pushed beyond their limits.

Each one of us bears the societal costs of inaction, of rapid incarceration, and of vagrants living below the Riverwalk, loitering under business awnings and wandering North Coast streets. Our municipalities also bear the community costs (on tight budgets) for frequent misuse/abuse of our parks and storefronts, compromises to first-responder times and attentions, and overuse of emergency rooms and services.

The unanticipated consequences of so many going without food, housing, prescriptions and insurances are borne by all. And I suspect these costs are far greater than any



Illustration by Noel Thomas

boarding house, soup kitchen, or day center we could design or imagine.

### Structural solutions

The third article, validates that there exist a number of abandoned properties and/or derelict buildings throughout Clatsop County. Warrenton City Manager Linda Engbreton is just the latest municipal executive or elected official to lament — despite the recent and welcome North Coast growth — that some unoccupied, no longer used or usable buildings remain as "a blight on the appearance and livability of our community."

This is noteworthy because, within discussions about homelessness solutions convened by/for the city of Astoria, the comment has been made, repeatedly, that: "Clatsop County lacks sufficient (affordable or available)

commercial square footage and any or many (vacant or buildable) parcels of land."

Now, I have not lived here very long, and admittedly know very little about what proposals have been considered (and previously rejected) regarding foreclosed, idle, neglected and unoccupied properties in town.

However, I am familiar with some structural solutions which mitigate homelessness. Examples include building an intergenerational support facility on a vacant lot where a school once stood, contractors donating money for a day center where a showroom once stood, and neighbors making a rooming house (for a number of clean and sober, homeless people — with jobs) where a hotel once stood.

Bill Van Nostrand is pastor of First Presbyterian Church — "The Yellow Church" on the corner of 11th Street and Grand Avenue.