

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Who should pay to operate new jail?

There is little doubt that Clatsop County needs a new jail.

Anyone who takes time to investigate the overcrowded old facility in downtown Astoria is almost guaranteed to come to that conclusion.

The lack of space in the 60-bed jail and the unacceptable revolving-door system has criminals laughing and our hardworking law enforcement officers increasingly frustrated. “Catch-and-release” should remain a fun fishing phrase, not a cynical observation on what happens to lawbreakers in our community.

Voters are being asked to approve a \$20 million bond that would cost them 21 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

Sensibly, county commissioners are looking ahead, planning beyond November, when voters will decide whether to move the jail to the former North Coast Youth Correctional Facility in Warrenton. That would have 148 beds, plus room for expansion.

Should the jail bond pass, a pressing issue for county leaders will be finding the money to operate it.

One option approved last week was a 1 percent lodging tax tacked onto each visitor’s hotel bill. This would generate significant revenue, of which some could be used for jail operations.

Predictably, the concept drew the ire of the hospitality industry, whose advocates worry that ramping up lodging taxes would scare away tourists.

The Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce and the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association rightly argue that tourism is a key cornerstone of our North Coast economy.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

The Astoria Riverfront Trolley passes under the Astoria Bridge with a load of passengers. Most of the money from a new county lodging tax would go to tourism promotion.

We live in the most desirable place on Earth. People want to visit, and we want to share it with them.

And we have all budgeted for a trip based on advertised hotel prices, only to be annoyed at checkout to discover our daily rate is boosted by additional room taxes.

In approving the tax, the commissioners weighed a crucial factor raised by Clatsop County Sheriff Tom Bergin — the volume of visitors increases crime. That isn’t being rude to tourists; it is a statistical inevitability. Our North Coast population swells by thousands each summer. We should welcome visitors, but with our eyes open to the added burden on law enforcement, plus the full realization that they all use local services and amenities that

residents pay for year-round.

Of course they are an easy target for added revenue. But if not tourists, who else should be taxed to help run the jail? There are few other places for budget managers to go that would be acceptable to residents.

Reading the details, the action should actually benefit the tourism and lodging industry.

The county already imposes a 9.5 percent lodging tax in unincorporated areas, in addition to state and city taxes. The new tax will apply within and outside city limits. It will take effect in January and generate an estimated \$1.4 million annually in revenue for the county and cities.

But it should be noted that by state law, 70 percent of this revenue must be

spent on tourism promotion. Only the remaining 30 percent — estimated at \$420,000 annually — can be used for jail operations.

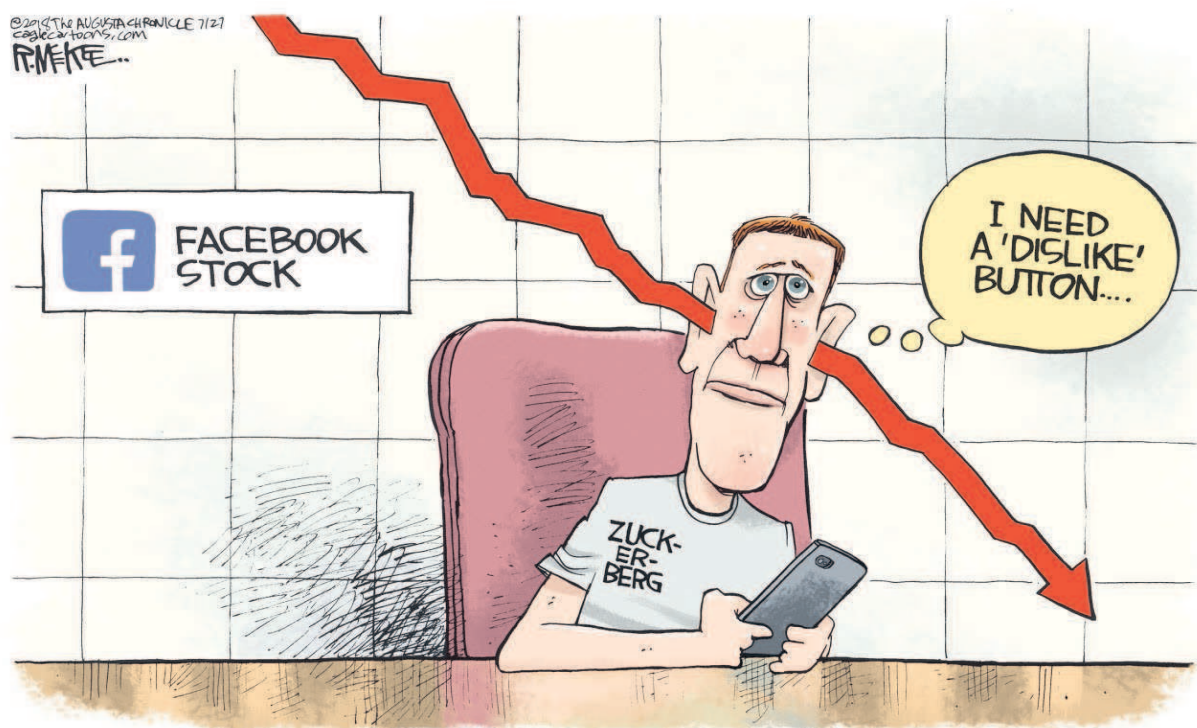
If the local \$1.4 million revenue estimate is accurate, that would mean about \$980,000 a year for local tourism promotion. We’d be interested in seeing a plan for that additional revenue that includes public education efforts geared at visitors, much like Bend’s “Visit Like a Local” program. It encourages visitors to clean up after themselves, volunteer for trail maintenance, learn how to use a traffic circle and not drink and drive, among other topics.

Three other bonds are on the ballot this fall, for Astoria and Warrenton schools and the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District. Voters have twice rejected jail building proposals, most recently in 2012. This latest jail bond is actually the smallest dollar amount of the four, costing a taxpayer with a \$200,000 home about \$42 a year.

The idea supported by the one dissenting commissioner, Lianne Thompson, that county leaders should wait on the lodging tax idea until the outcome until the November vote, is far from prudent.

If voters approve the jail Nov. 6 and some partial operational funding is not in place, the board would have just 37 workdays to dream up and approve a different strategy.

That’s unnecessary pressure on a group of five commissioners finishing up its 2018 agenda and gearing up for a significant leadership changeover, with two new members starting work in the new year.



LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer’s name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar, and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed 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 in poor taste will not be printed.

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WRITER’S NOTEBOOK

Oregon farmers will feel Trump’s trade war

Beneath the level of congressional anguish over tariffs and the prospect of trade war, American farmers are taking a hit. Mostly that’s happening in the soybean fields of the Midwest. But Oregon agriculture will not be on the sidelines.

Writing in last Thursday’s New York Times, an Iowa radio station news director provided an on-the-ground report from America’s breadbasket. “Trump has no idea what his tariffs have unleashed for farmers,” wrote Robert Leonard, who projected the hollowing out of rural communities as longtime farmers sell their operations.

People who have never lived in farm country or known farmers likely underestimate the complexity of making a living in agriculture. They also likely do not understand the efforts that farm groups have undertaken over decades to grow their markets abroad.

When my wife and I lived in Washington, D.C., from 1978 to 1987, I watched many

‘People who have never lived in farm country or known farmers likely underestimate the complexity of making a living in agriculture.’

Northwesterners come to town to lobby. On an annual basis the most sophisticated group I encountered was the Oregon Wheat Growers League. From growing up in Pendleton, I knew some of these men. Their lobbying involved not only Capitol Hill, but also trips to the State and Agriculture departments.

In the agricultural lore of Eastern Oregon, one of the most renowned success stories was how Pendleton Grain Growers, a farmer cooperative, went to Japan in the decade following World War II. Their objective was to cultivate that market for the soft white wheat grown on the Umatilla Plateau. The cooperative’s president, James Hill (father of Astoria boat builder Tim Hill), was a leader of the delegation. To equip himself following the war, Hill earned an MBA.

In Pendleton, my childhood memories include foreign delegations of farmers from

Africa and the Middle East brought to our region by the State Department. These groups were often given dinner at the home of my aunt, Amy Bedford.

The internationalism I witnessed has become a dirty word in the world of Trump. The consequences are not pretty. Leonard notes that many Iowans who helped put Trump into office now find themselves on the cold end of the president’s eagerness for trade war.

And now comes this warning in the current issue of Bloomberg Businessweek. “China’s recent decision to impose a 25 percent tariff on U.S. soybean exports could reduce shipments by as much as \$7.7 billion, according to a University of Tennessee study. America’s loss will be Brazil’s gain. The South American nation overtook the U.S. as the top soybean exporter in 2013, and its lead has widened

since — though to the detriment of efforts to curb deforestation (of the Amazon).”

So far, Northwest agriculture is not feeling the brunt of the brewing trade war. But America’s not being in the Trans Pacific Partnership penalizes Oregon wheat growers who will likely lose ground to Canada and Australia in the Japanese and Korean markets.

The larger Northwest impacts of the Chinese tariffs will be felt by growers of hazelnuts, apples, cherries, berries and alfalfa. The beef and dairy industries will be impacted. Tariffs on wine will increase.

The Trump presidency lives on easy slogans and easy solutions. For the president’s fervent supporters, sticking it to our valued trading partners such as Canada and China is red meat. The problem is that trade policy, as it affects America’s breadbasket, does not lend itself to pat solutions, because it is a complex web of relationships that move in both directions. In matters of trade, there is no such thing as a unilateral action without retaliation and far-reaching consequences.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of The Daily Astorian, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group.