

OPINION

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We need a new jail — and better mental health services

Treatment of mentally ill is a tragedy

Our jails have, tragically, become our de facto mental health treatment facilities as a lack of services, and often a lack of training or understanding, mean that many people in various stages of mental health crisis end up entering the criminal justice system.

While police agencies are increasingly getting training in crisis intervention, many times those who are struggling with mental health symptoms end up being arrested and incarcerated when they present a perceived danger to themselves or others. Once the person is in the criminal justice system, the treatment they receive is often substandard to nonexistent.

The way people who are struggling with mental health symptoms are treated in our society, and specifically in the criminal justice system, is a tragedy, and one that we cannot afford to look away from.

Those who are arrested and come to the Clatsop County Jail are faced with a grim and potentially unsafe environment. The downtown Astoria jail is a brutalist block of a building, not designed with modern uses in mind. Cramped corridors, crowded cells, cold concrete, lack of natural light, and sometimes seclusion and lack of human contact exacerbate mental health symptoms, worsening the crisis.

In my experience, corrections deputies try their best to treat people in mental health crises humanely, but they are constrained by the same environmental challenges and crowded conditions. Inmates who are struggling the most with mental health symptoms are usually housed by themselves, which may mean



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

The old youth detention facility near Warrenton sits unoccupied.

that other potential beds cannot be used. Also, the cells that are actually designated for seclusion, such as “the rubber room,” are spartan and unsettling places.

The voters of Clatsop County have to decide whether to build a new jail in November. We have a unique opportunity to use a pre-existing facility in the former Oregon Youth Authority building in Warrenton to build a more modern, and more cost-effective, jail for Clatsop County. And in doing so, we can provide a safer facility for inmates, whether suffering from mental illness or not, and for the corrections deputies.

It is clear that our community can use a new jail facility, but it is important that we understand what we are getting, and what we

are not getting. While the argument for a new jail with additional beds can be made in terms of public safety and certainty in sentencing, more jail beds alone will not be sufficient to address the mental health crisis our country, and our county, is facing. And additional funding for a new jail cannot take the place of continued advocacy for increased funding and improved programs to address mental health treatment and services. We cannot be complacent about the fact that our jail is often the primary contact that those who are suffering from mental health symptoms have with government services. Our citizens deserve better. Those who are in crisis deserve more support and compassion, and those who are not suffering from mental health symptoms

should want to see a more competent and appropriate response. Homelessness, addiction, and mental health issues impact all of us, our families and our communities.

The NAMI Clatsop affiliate advisory committee supports a new jail for Clatsop County, and we also hope all citizens of Clatsop County will join us in advocating for an improved mental health system. We would also encourage creative ideas and community collaboration for the use of the existing jail building, and that the potential for some sort of mental health or addiction use can be explored.

Kirk Wintermute is a local attorney and president of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Clatsop County.

LETTERS

Jacob showed us value of local development

One of the most important of many lessons Jake (Robert Jacob) taught us all is the value and worth of local development.

The story of his interest and involvement in the Liberty Theatre says it all (“A crazy genius and his demons,” The Daily Astorian, Sept. 10). Had he not shared his vision with other citizens, we most certainly would not have the gem we are so lucky to have today. As a result, we attract world-class talent we could never afford, due to the setting, the people, and ultimately, the venue they perform in.

Jake didn’t need or want a Hilton, a Hyatt or a Trump to build his hotel; he did it his way.

This is a challenge the city commissions and government will face continually, as big monied interests look to exploit/rape our character and beauty with little regard as to the consequences.

We don’t want to look back and think, “what a great little town Astoria used to be.” This has happened to too many colorful, quaint American towns.

CHRIS CONNAWAY
Astoria

Democrats still refuse to accept the impossible

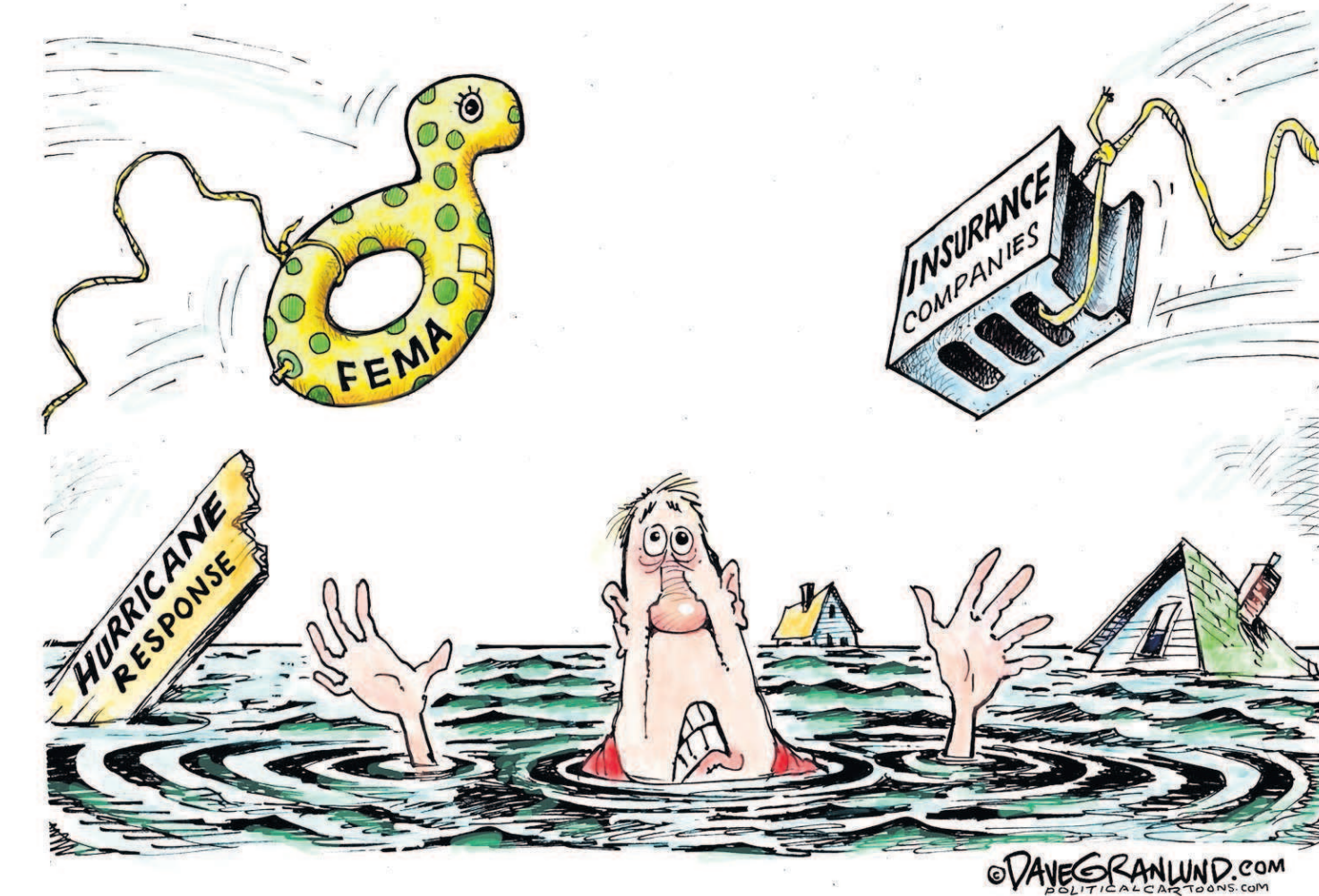
Democrats throughout the nation have been making fools of themselves — inflicting vicious riots erupting in destruction and general mayhem — for nearly two years, continually trying to deny that Donald Trump is president of the U.S.

For too long they’ve been envisioning their beloved “Queen” Hillary as the “chosen one” to occupy the Oval Office. They still refuse to accept the fact that the unbelievable, the impossible, the inconceivable happened — the wild man from the amateur ranks came on and, after knocking off over a dozen professional politicians (Republicans), had the audacity to defeat their goddess.

Since that unfathomable day, the Democrats and their accomplices — the ridiculously left wing-biased news media — have jointly pulled every possible trick out of their well-worn bag to overturn the election.

Their main contention is that the Russians made the “impossible” happen, as ridiculous as that argument is. Vladimir Putin and his Kremlin cronies must be having the laughs of a lifetime.

Actually, I’m certain that Putin would rather have had Queen Hillary in the White House, because she’s as clueless and ignorant



as the previous president, Barack Obama.
E. ROBERT NASSIKAS
Astoria

Don’t let developers move in and take over

I recently spent the day in Manzanita, and it is so obvious there that the lovely quiet town that was, is on a fast track to becoming another Seaside and Cannon Beach, with housing no regular resident can afford, unbelievable traffic and few living-wage jobs.

This is the way Astoria seems to be going, as well, and I feel anger and sadness that outside money can come in and erase our way of life, not enhance it in any way, and tell us we need them. Outside interests are now turning their attention to the South Slope, which is a quiet, desirable neighborhood and planning to make it, too, a tourist destination.

There is still time to prevent this. We don’t need two more cookie-cutter chain hotels. We need low-income housing, a solution to our homeless problem and living-wage jobs as our priorities. On the South Slope, we could use a grocery store because traffic to drive to the others, especially in the summer,

is already unbelievable.

I hope our town residents will urge our leaders to consider carefully what we want our town to look like, and to move swiftly, before it is too late. We don’t need more lengthy studies while the developers move in and take over.

TERRIE POWERS
Astoria

All Oregonians should be equally protected by the law

I have serious concerns about Measure 105 on November’s mid-term ballot. If passed, Measure 105 will force Oregon taxpayers to fund state and local law enforcement personnel to assist and collaborate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to racially profile immigrant community members.

Consider: We already pay federal taxes to cover ICE budgets, and we already pay state and local taxes to fund local law enforcement. Why pay twice?

Also, if immigrants fear being profiled, they will fear contacting the police for any legal reason. Measure 105 will reduce public safety. All Oregonians should be equally protected by the law.

An exercise that helps me understand positions on many issues is to look at who does or does not support that issue. In the case of Measure 105, Oregonians for Immigration Reform (OFIR) sponsors the proposal. OFIR is listed by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) as a hate group because OFIR apparently hates immigrants.

Some may have questions about SPLC, but I can’t find any one else keeping an eye on the haters.

RD SMITH
Gearhart

A practical approach to Astoria mayoral race

Bruce Jones has already been elected to Astoria’s City Council. If defeated in our mayoral race, he’ll continue serving as a city councilor.

Dulce Taylor has never sat on the Astoria City Council. If defeated in our mayoral race, she’ll remain outside City Hall.

The only way to judiciously combine their forces for the good of all Astorians is by voting in Taylor.

LARRY ZIAK
Astoria