

OPINION

editor@dailyastorian.com



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

KARI BORGES
Publisher

JIM VAN NOSTRAND
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation Manager

DEBRA BLOOM
Business Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
Systems Manager

OUR VIEW

Transparency messy, but necessary

A few words about government transparency: It makes democracy messy for government officials; it makes democracy inconvenient for those who hold power; it makes democracy work.

The Kate Brown administration got a quick comeuppance last week and a partial lesson in transparency.

The Oregon Department of Education quietly decided it was not releasing the annual school district report cards, as had been scheduled for last week, and instead would delay them until Nov. 15.

The public was outraged. Gubernatorial candidate Knute Buehler seized on this — rightly so — as an example of Gov. Brown's lack of transparency. At Brown's direction, the department hastily reversed course and released the data, more or less.

The public now can use the Department of Education website to look up report cards on the performance of each school district and individual schools, but cannot run comparisons. State schools chief Colt Gill said programming required more time, which was one reason for the Nov. 15 release date.

The Oregonian newspaper proved him wrong. Overnight, its newsroom data team converted material into a useable, searchable format. The newspaper also deserves credit for breaking the original story about the delay, showing



AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus

Oregon Department of Education Director Colt Gill speaks with reporters last week in Portland about the state's statistical school rankings.

once again why a democracy needs a free press to serve as watchdogs.

It was not lost on anyone — except perhaps Gill, who said the outcry caught him off guard — that Nov. 15 is after the gubernatorial election in which education could be a deciding issue for voters.

This episode either was tone-deaf management by Gill or, as Buehler claimed, deliberate deception by Brown or her staff. In the end, as Gill said was the case, the data showed little new about Oregon schools. What Oregonians will remember, however, is that Brown's administration intended to delay the data

release, regardless of why.

Brown got a reprieve on another debacle. The Oregon Court of Appeals temporarily blocked a lower court ruling that would have forced disclosure of potential legislation being considered by her administration.

Those legislative concepts — more than 260 of them — might have revealed whether Brown was considering tax increases and other controversial measures for the 2019 Legislature. After ending the 2017 session by saying tax reform was a high priority for 2019, Brown has not followed through — at

least not publicly.

Legislative concepts submitted by state agencies have been considered public records in the past, although little attention was paid to them. Now the Brown administration is making the dubious claim that they are protected by attorney-client privilege. Even then, Brown could choose to make them public.

It appears that political opponents wanted access to those legislative concepts, probably to use against Brown in the election. That is one of the risks a public official takes. Incumbency has a great advantage over challengers, but incumbency should never shield a politician from transparency.

Brown supporters will argue that Buehler is not being transparent, because he has not released his complete income tax returns, unlike Brown. They are right; however, there is a difference between public records and an unelected person's private tax returns.

Candidates promote transparency when running for office, whether for city councils and school boards or the presidency and governorships. Once in office, they prefer the darkness of closed government to the sunlight of full disclosure. That shift might be understandable but it is inexcusable.

Full transparency must be the constant standard by which Oregon government operates.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Jones for the pilot seat

Astoria has an unusual opportunity to elect a remarkably qualified leader.

Bruce Jones, whom I first met when he was commander of Group Astoria, U.S. Coast Guard, seven years ago, brings remarkably broad leadership and knowledge to a city we love. I'm impressed with his campaign manner. He's participating in every sort of community conversation, from the arts to natural resources, and not simply showing up to shake hands. He's listening carefully, enjoying thoroughly, engaging in substantive conversations about the work and needs of the organization.

Astoria isn't just geographically on an edge. It's also on the edge of maintaining its heritage — its "grit" — on the edge of being overly "discovered," of struggling with big-city problems like homelessness, housing, traffic and crime.

Bruce is a helicopter pilot who, among other duties, commanded Coast Guard assets in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, when the Coast Guard was the only government entity that showed up and delivered. He's showing up and delivering for Astoria.

Harry Reasoner once wrote: "A helicopter does not want to fly. It is maintained in the air by a variety of forces and controls working in opposition to each other, and if there is any disturbance in the delicate balance, the helicopter stops flying, immediately and disastrously. There is no such thing as a gliding helicopter."

We need Bruce Jones in the pilot seat. Please join me in voting for Bruce Jones for Astoria's mayor for the 21st century.

JOSH MARQUIS
Clatsop County District Attorney

'Yes' for Astoria kids

I have been an educational assistant at Astoria Middle School for the past six years. I support the Astoria school bond. I work in all the classrooms in the area they call the "diamond," where the classrooms only have a small window, if any. The majority of the rooms don't have a window to the outside. This can be a very difficult environment in which to learn for students and in which to work for staff.

In addition to limited windows, our building does not have reliable heating or cooling. In the winter months, the building temperature is often below 60 degrees in the halls. Yet, in the early fall and late spring, the classroom temperature is nearly 90 degrees. Our students and staff deserve to work and learn in buildings where the boilers work, or at least they can be repaired when needed.

The building looks worn out. There are classrooms and hallways where the floors are not connected to the wall, and doors won't close.

The Astoria School District needs to assure that we have facilities that are safe. In particular, the district needs to monitor and control entry and exits, as well as provide security cameras and door lock systems that assure our

students are safe and secure at school.

The Astoria community has a very important decision to make about the future of our education within our school district. Our children are our responsibility and our future. Please vote "yes" for Astoria kids.

JULIE NIEMI
Astoria

Vote 'no' on Warrenton school bond

Last week I received my voters pamphlet in the mail. I always enjoy reading the arguments in favor and arguments against for all the measures. On Measure 4-198, Warrenton School District 30C bond proposal, there were no arguments against. I would like to remedy that lapse.

For a \$200,000 home, the tax increase per year for 31 years is \$536 (\$2.68 times 200) more each year as the property increases in value. I very much doubt my Social Security increase is going to cover it. My home is my nest egg. If I ever go into assisted living, the value of my house will have to cover the \$5,000 or more per month that will cost me. God help me if I live longer than the 35 to 40 months the money will cover.

I looked into the state deferral on real estate taxes, but that has an interest rate of 6 percent each year on the outstanding deferral. It wouldn't take very long for that to eat up those "assisted living" months.

This kind of tax increase will also hit all those older folks who rent. No apartment owner will just eat that tax increase. The rent will just have to go up, believe me.

Don't get me wrong. I would love for the children to have a safe place to be from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. But what happens if the tsunami hits on the weekend, or later in the afternoon or at night? How much would it cost to protect all of us 24/7? Maybe we should all move to higher ground. Excuse my levity.

I don't know how many Warrenton residents can afford that kind of increase to their taxes. I can't, and will vote "no."

AVIS BUCK
Warrenton

More info needed on Warrenton variance

On Sept. 4, a formal proposal was received from Pacific Seafood requesting a two-stage project that would require a land zoning variance — along with a major modification to the Warrenton building code — to allow this company to create a new type of housing, located directly adjacent to the Columbia River in Warrenton, to be used only by the seasonal transient employees of this company.

On Oct. 12, a local newspaper printed the limited information available to the public for this proposal ("Seafood processor plans worker housing in Warrenton," The Daily Astorian).

This is another non-transparent Warrenton government process used to conceal from the voters what is about to happen in their city. This news article stated there will be a meeting in November to discuss the zoning variance. It did not state if there would be a vote at that time on the zone variance.

Creating a totally new type of housing for Warrenton, which is the implied goal of this proposal, is a citywide issue of great interest to a large number of voters. We need a public meeting where voters can voice objections to this proposal without the maximum three-minute time limit the mayor allows. It is necessary for newspapers to report these public objections at least two weeks before a final rezoning vote, so newspaper readers are fully informed.

SCOTT WIDDICOMBE
Warrenton

Jones for Astoria mayor

Sometimes at City Council over the past four years, I've wished for big bags of large denomination dollars and a Big Idea to start or move a project along. They would help, of course, but not without the essential element: Leadership.

Google the word "leadership" and get 1.8 billion results, all with common words. Integrity. Focus. Self-awareness. Passion. Empathy. Empowerment. Decisiveness. Expertise.

Bruce Jones should be Astoria's next mayor. He has a record of leadership that carries our respect. He knows how Astoria fits within the economic and social structure of our neighbor cities, the county, the state, the federal government.

I've sat next to Bruce and worked with him on City Council for the past two years. We haven't always voted the same way. I've an idealist's raised-fist "fight the power" streak that Bruce smiles and nods his head at, and then makes an independent, well-reasoned decision. I respect him, and I like him. I trust Bruce to make balanced, inclusive decisions that will benefit all Astorians.

It's been a great honor and much fun to represent Ward 3 as a city councilor for the past four years, and I hope I served you well. The decisions I made were never based on special interests or identity politics. I listened to you, I learned the facts and the laws, I worked for the betterment of Astoria. I watched Bruce Jones do that, too.

Please vote for Bruce Jones. He is the mayor for Astoria.

CINDY PRICE
Astoria City Councilor, Ward 3

Vote 'no' on Measure 104

Have you read Oregon's Measure 104? I did. Wow.

Aren't you tired of the political double-speak over ballot measures? Pro and con sides attempt to make their case, but if you're like me, your mind is spinning. "Yes" folks want you to believe the bill will make it easier to buy a home or car, and fear is their cannon. "If this bill does not pass, the Home Mort-

gage Interest Deduction will be eliminated. It will harder to buy a home." Well, no. It's because fewer homes are being built, they are outrageously expensive and employers refuse to pay their workers a living wage.

Supporters of 104 include the Automobile Dealers Association of Portland (average new car price, \$33,560); Oregon Home Builders Association (average new home price, \$315,000 to \$410,000); and the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association (average hotel price midweek for one night, \$151). Can't imagine why they would support such a bill.

"No" people claim it's a scam allowing corporations more tax breaks, like big dairy farmers, owners of mobile home parks, vacation homes and businesses making more than half-a-million dollars a year. Y'know? Common folk.

The state Constitution calls it "raising revenue," which Oregon courts have interpreted to mean a bill that brings in money by levying or increasing a tax.

Therefore a bill imposing a tax for some benefit or service is not included. Like, for example, buying a home? Or a car? Or a haircut? Could that happen? Why not? That's a "service."

When politicians start tweaking a standing bill, something smells. Like Measure 104. Vote "no."

THOMAS RYAN
Seaside

Mayoral candidate's behavior off-putting

I am writing this letter to express my opinion and disapproval of Bruce Jones for mayor. I have attended several city council meetings, and witnessed how he bullies other members until they agree with his demands. This behavior comes from his experience as a commander in the Coast Guard, where he was conditioned to issue orders without opposition.

When citizens from the community present their valid concerns about fee increases, he smirks and laughs. I believe he operates in the vein of Queen Marie Antoinette with his "let him eat cake" approach to our community's concerns.

Instead of being supportive of our tourism industry, he refers to the visitors who spend their hard-earned money with our local businesses, while attempting to visit a world-famous site, as "crazy people" ("Astoria approves steep fines for parking violations near Goonies house," The Daily Astorian, Oct. 16).

He doesn't understand that he cannot keep increasing fees and taxes on the local citizens and dismissing one of the largest industries in our city. He should welcome and encourage local tourism and the opportunities that his so-called "crazy people" bring by experiencing our community's stores, restaurants and museums.

DAVID JOHNSEN
Astoria