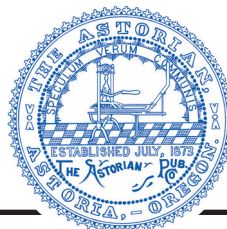


OPINION

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the Astorian

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OUR VIEW

Our legislators stand up for convictions

Politicians deserve plaudits when they do the right thing. In Oregon, they're likely to get punished.

Such is the case with two Democrats who represent the North Coast — veteran Sen. Betsy Johnson of Scappoose and first-term Rep. Tiffany Mitchell of Astoria — who got in trouble for standing up for their convictions.

Johnson is one of the most independent-minded legislators in the state Capitol, known for following her conscience instead of the party line. She is a straight talker, a trait that endears her even to people who disagree. This year she gained even more influence, being appointed to help lead the Legislature's Joint Committee on Ways & Means, which makes the state budget decisions.

In an unusual move, Senate President Peter Courtney had split the Senate Ways & Means co-chair's position in half, appointing Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Beaverton, and Johnson as "co-co-chairs" to share the job. Rep. Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis, is the co-chair for the House.

Courtney would have none of Johnson's independence when it came time last week for Ways & Means to vote on House Bill 2020, a carbon cap-and-trade scheme known by its supporters as Clean Fuel Jobs. Courtney temporarily replaced her on the committee with himself, ensuring the bill would be approved — on party-line votes.



Betsy Johnson

Clear-eyed Johnson had recognized the bill's flaws and, to the angst of its supporters, had proposed significant changes.

Supporters have consistently pointed out that the bill has been years in the making and thus has been well-vetted. But length of construction does not necessarily guarantee the quality of the outcome. In sending the bill to the House floor for a vote, the Ways & Means Committee also adopted the 116th amendment proposed this year for the bill. (Johnson's proposal was amendment 102.)

Courtney holds the authority to appoint Senate committee members and to replace them. But might does not make right.

His egregious power play cut out one of Oregon's most capable legislators. It also illustrated the liberal Senate Democrats' desperation to pass legislation that essentially will accomplish nothing to affect global climate change.



Tiffany Mitchell

Expect Johnson to have a lot to say when HB 2020 reaches the Senate floor.

As for Mitchell, she is under fire from the public employee unions that helped elect her. Mitchell joined most other House Democrats to pass Senate Bill 1049, which makes changes in the underfunded Oregon Public Employees Retirement System. (Johnson voted for it in the Senate.)

The major change is extending the timeline for bolstering reserves that PERS needs to meet its expected pension obligations. What angers public employees is that a small portion of their supplemental retirement accounts now will be diverted to that cause, helping reduce the PERS unfunded actuarial liability. That change could trim their final pensions by 1 percent to 2 percent.

Politically, Mitchell was in a no-win situation. She faced intense pressure on one side from public

employees, who now feel betrayed by her, and on the other side from the Democratic legislative leaders demanding passage of SB 1049.

As a candidate, Mitchell had vowed to stand up for public employees. As a legislator, she had assumed she would vote against SB 1049, after House Speaker Tina Kotek and Courtney revealed their legislation. Then she had an epiphany: The PERS situation was far worse and would cause greater damage to public budgets — and jobs — than she previously had understood.

"The insight I gained as a legislator into the actuarial issues surrounding PERS forced me to question my assumptions," she wrote in a thoughtful explanation of her vote.

Indeed, the issues facing legislators often are more complicated and carry greater ramifications than people outside the Capitol may perceive. Mitchell deserves credit for achieving that realization, regardless of how anyone feels about her vote.

The Daily Astorian's editorial board reluctantly endorsed Mitchell during her election campaign. We were skeptical whether she would have the gumption to represent all of her constituents, not just her progressive base. We were wrong.

We elect legislators to make the best possible decisions for the whole of Oregon. In their own ways, Mitchell and Johnson have done so.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Political chaos

For many years, Democrats and Republicans have been escalating tit-for-tat partisan changes to America's way of governing itself. A recent example ended in regrettable changes to the confirmation process for federal judgeships — a process that worked well for 200 years. And in my book, neither political party will end up a hero in the long run for doing that.

When Barack Obama was president, the Democratic majority in the U.S. Senate changed rules to effectively eliminate Republican opposition to Obama's appointments of all judges, except justices of the Supreme Court. After Senate Republicans became the majority, they adopted Democrat precedent, and extended the new rule to squelch Democrat opposition to all judicial appointments, including the Supreme Court.

With tit-for-tat history like this, it's mind-boggling that Democratic presidential wannabes and Congressmen act as if they've never heard the expression, "be careful what you wish for."

Today, some Democrats want to impeach President Donald Trump for inexplicable reasons, an effort reeking of extremism. That effort's even bad enough to raise a red flag for Democratic Party leadership.

Other Democrat precedent-setters are Congressional investigations into President Trump's private life before he was elected. This is odd strategy for 2020 presidential elections. One wonders what might happen to a Democrat president the next time Republicans have the power to do, tit-for-tat, what Democrats are doing today.

If Democrats hold their present course, America can look forward to many more years of tit-for-tat political chaos. Along with Trump's re-election in 2020.

DON HASKELL
Astoria

Educators care

Having just concluded two years working for the Astoria School District as the family school liaison, and as someone who had never before worked in education, I would like to invite readers to learn from my experience on the inside, and perhaps think about how we engage our local schools and other community governments.

First off, without reservation, every person involved in the education process of

our children has displayed nothing less than complete dedication and passion for them; it's not just a job.

Whether it was administrative assistants who regularly and consistently go out of their way to make a difference in a struggling student's day; teachers and other professional staff who work far beyond their paid time supporting activities, counseling, or grading; or caring administrators who daily balance and respect the multitudinous needs of the students, those they lead, or other stakeholders.

These people care. More than many of us could sustain on the regular basis that they do.

If we, as a community, see flaws in our school system, or staff, I encourage you to be part of the system, rather than denigrate it on Facebook for the consumption of your acquaintances, or leaving angry calls to the building administrators (who are, to a person, some of the finest people I've ever met).

Instead, volunteer, join a parents' club or attend a school board meeting regularly. Be part of making our public school system better, rather than being upset or discouraged from the sidelines.

MICHAEL OLSEN
Astoria

Climate action needed

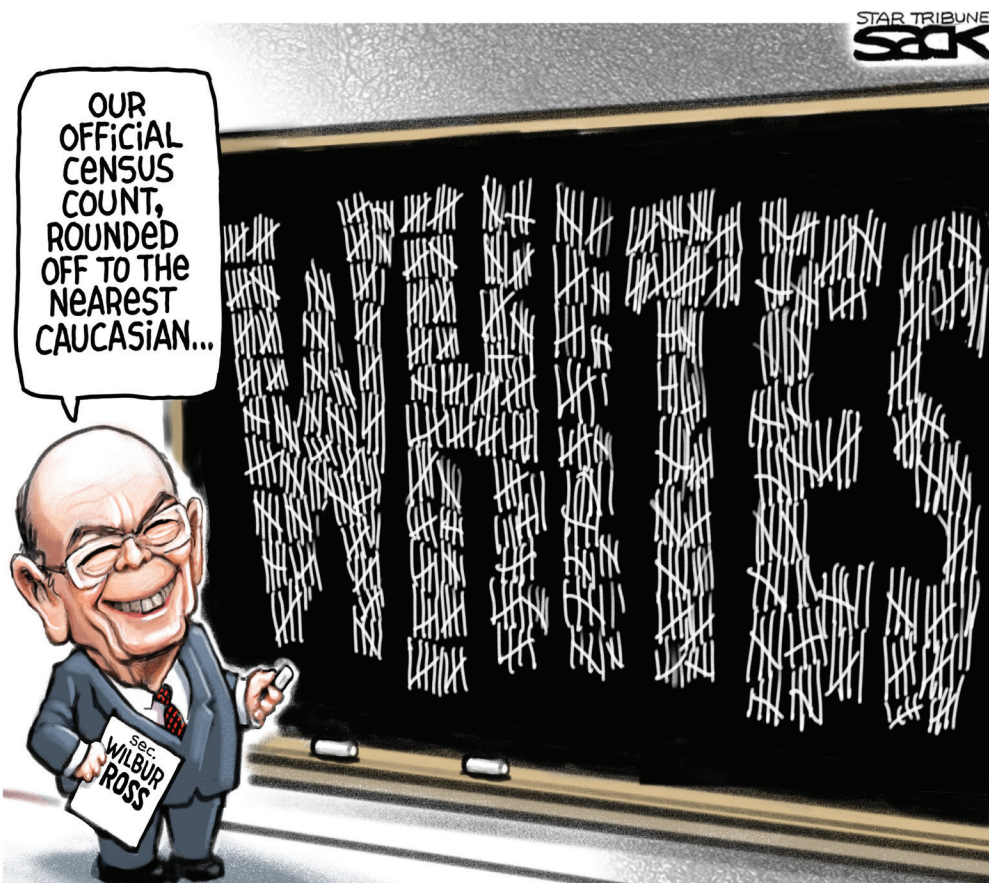
I applaud The Astorian for its coverage of climate change. Left unchecked, it will upend our economy, as documented in the fourth National Climate Assessment.

Impacts can be seen outside of a scientific report. In 2015, abnormally high ocean and air temperatures in the Pacific Northwest offered a preview of a future climate. Farmers, fishermen and foresters were confronted with a low snowpack, drought, toxic algae blooms and two million acres of forest fires.

I want to clarify a detail in the June 8 editorial "Our View: Cap and trade bill would be disastrous." The editorial says Oregon would be the second state with a cap and trade program. Oregon would actually be the eleventh.

In 2009, nine eastern states formed the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), an interstate cap and trade program. New Jersey is in the process of joining.

Greenhouse gas emissions from the industries covered by the RGGI program have fallen by 40 percent while that region experienced higher economic growth than the rest of the nation.



These states are acting because the federal government has failed to address climate change.

A bipartisan bill in Congress — HR 763 — offers a national solution. Funds raised from the largest greenhouse gas emitters would be redistributed in a monthly dividend check to American families. Based on the June 8 editorial, The Astorian might support this bill.

But without nationwide action, Oregon needs to join in the fight. We can't afford to let 2015 become the new normal.

CHRIS CLATTERBUCK
Astoria

Voice for unborn?

In response to the letter "Abortion rights" (The Astorian, June 13), the writer states that "everyone should have their voices heard" and "every woman deserves the right to their own body, and what to do with it."

My question is this: Who is the voice for the unborn? What happened to their right to be born? They have no voice or rights, and are at the mercy of the hands of people who choose to end their lives.

The writer states that she is "glad to live in a state that is for abortions." I, on the other hand, am deeply saddened to live in a country that takes away life and breath

from a living soul.

Whenever I hear the song "God Bless America," I can't help but think of how God can ever bless America as long as we continue to destroy countless innocent lives.

KATHY OLSON
Astoria

Students deserve better

In the June 8 edition of The Astorian, a Knappa High School senior wrote about electives being taken out of the schools, such as art education ("Need art education"). Great letter.

More emphasis has been put on core subjects, to absolutely no avail for our students and the education system. The U.S. is near the bottom. It assumes students will go to college. It takes away so many opportunities for young people to develop skills in trades, or to get some mental and physical balance in school.

Also, have you seen the obesity in kids? Where is physical education in school? Too many young people are inactive because of the Internet and phones, etc.

Schools can't take the place of parenting, but with so many hours spent in classes, more can be done. So much more. Our young people deserve better.

ROBIN RODGERS
Astoria