OPINION

the Astorian
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Founded in 1873

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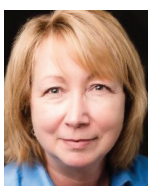
PUBLISHER'S NOTEBOOK

Readers give feedback on Sports Extra

Despite the certainty that what we publish will never please all of our readers all of the time, at The Astorian we still continually strive to improve our content and timeliness.

When we selected our publication days for the three-days a week print schedule, we chose to print a Saturday newspaper partly because we could improve our timeliness with Friday night football coverage.



KARI BORGEN

So in September we added Saturday Sports Extra, a four-page weekly section that featured a local Friday night high school football game, the local Friday night football scores and additional stories about high school athletes and teams.

The section published during the nine weeks of the regular high school fall season, Sept. 7 through Nov. 2.

Logistically, it was a challenge. Our lone sports reporter and photographer were required to cover a home game every week, then write and send the story and photos all before 10:30 p.m. that night, regardless of when the game ended. Editor Derrick DePledge would return to work to consult with our remote page design desk, round up the rest of the Friday night scores, and then finish the content and pages, which were due to the platemaking machine by 11 p.m.

Plates were burned, installed on the press and the press run started by 11:15 p.m. The Sports Extra section was added to the B and A sections with advertising inserts, labeled, packaged and sent out the door by 2 a.m. to make it to the various post offices in the county by 6 a.m. so that it would be delivered with Saturday's mail.

Was it worth it? Did our readers care that we worked at breakneck speed in the middle of the night in order to get them a Sports Extra section for Saturday's newspaper?

According to a survey we conducted of our readers, the answer is "yes" ...and "no."

Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Astoria quarterback Bo Williams steps back and prepares to throw the football in a game against Banks.

Here are the survey results, conducted through email and print to our subscribers:

• 63% read it at least once in the nine weeks published.

• 45% read it every single week or almost every week. Another 18% read it, but less than half of the weeks it published.

• 37% did not read it — not even once.

Of those that responded, 77% read the Friday night game story and scores, 72% read the Athletes of the Week feature, and 70% read the high school sports wrap-up stories on Page 2. A little less than half read the Oregon college football previews (47%) and Seattle Seahawks previews (44%).

Here is a sample of the feedback:

"I really enjoy reading about high school sports. I would like to see in-depth articles from all the schools."

"The section was great, especially the Oregon-Oregon State preview and the Seahawks preview. Please bring it back."

"Everyone is not a Duck fan. More Beaver sports news."

"Focus on local sports. This isn't how I receive information on sports that I follow. I would rather choose what I want, which is easily done online."

"Replace with hard news."

"Get rid of it."

"Eliminate sports and add more state or national news."

"Inclusion of more national news on weekend would be an improvement in the paper."

"More local news and features instead of national news."

"I glance at your sports photos because you do such a good job but sports are of no interest to us."

"Put more effort into news than things like this — your content is rapidly going downhill in quality and quantity!"

So what are our takeaways from the survey?

Not surprisingly, about half of our readers are avid sports fans, and half couldn't care less. National studies generally peg newspaper sports readership at about 20%, but in a small community we care more about local sports because they connect us to families, education and community events.

Readers who liked the section really liked it. Particularly the featured Friday night game and local high school coverage.

Although Knappa football went deep into the playoffs, our largest high schools — Astoria and Seaside — had less successful football seasons. Support from local business advertising was good, despite the win-loss records. Saturday newspaper sales in store and on racks though, were ho-hum.

Surprisingly, despite the fact that The Astorian posts daily at dailyastorian.com, and the digital versions are free with print subscription, none of the respondents mentioned going to the dailyastorian.com or our social media for local sports updates over the weekend. (Note, if you'd like to learn more about activating the digital portion of your subscription, call our customer service team at 800-781-3214.)

The survey included good suggestions for including a broader scope of sports information, including neighboring Pacific County schools —we are following Naselle's playoff run now. It is interesting, though not surprising, that reader opinions differ widely on how much space should be devoted to national news.

I'll be sharing some of the other opinions and suggestions we received about The Astorian unrelated to sports coverage in an upcoming column. It's interesting reading.

We'll weigh this survey with a number of other important factors, like our employees' opinions and resource priorities, as we plan our sports coverage for next fall.

If you missed your chance to comment, please email me at kborgen@dailyastorian.com, or take the survey at http://surveymonkey.com/r/8G8876Z

Kari Borgen is the publisher of The Astorian.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Never

I'll be honest, I dislike just about every vote that a Republican representative makes. That said, I would never, never, never consider signing a petition to recall one of them for that reason.

Recalls are for situations when an elected official breaks the law, or commits a serious ethical violation (like sentencing a rapist to six months, so as not to ruin their future). Voting as a representative sees fit doesn't qualify.

As lawn signs go up demanding a recall of Rep. Tiffiny Mitchell, I'm truly shocked and a little disappointed. I ask folks why they have one and they spout rumor, all of which can be disproved with a little research. Or, they don't like how she voted. None can cite an actual ethical violation or dereliction of duty.

Rep. Mitchell is one of 38 Democratic representatives in the Oregon Legislature. Her vote does not control an outcome. One has to wonder who's paying for those signs and pushing a recall against this particular individual, and why.

As paid signature gatherers canvass the area, I hope that each of you will consider not signing based on rumor, emotions, or general dislike for an opposing party.

I would like to know that there are not 4,883 among us who would so flagrantly disregard the very idea of democracy that they will work to undermine the process. There is already an excellent procedure in place to remove unwanted representatives; it's called voting. #RejectTheRecall

YVETTE CLARK
Nehalelm

Difficult

I understand how difficult it is to face the prospect of changing one's job or career. In my adult working life, I have been laid off, had to move to find work, gone back to school to learn a new skill, left a job because of an untenable working environment.

All of these changes were anxiety provoking. I can empathize with the people in Oregon who have made timber harvest their life's work, as they are facing a potentially big change, as well.

My sense of the qualities in state Rep. Tiffiny Mitchell is that she is very interested in listening to everyone's point of view, and trying to understand the difficulties they are facing. She is attempting to balance these perspectives with the knowledge that "business as usual" will condemn our children and grandchildren to immense hardship on an inhospitable planet.

I urge you to not sign the recall petition, but instead work with Rep. Mitchell on our common goals of jobs and housing for everyone, without continued damage to our state and its forests.

SHARON KLOEPFER
Gearhart

Decline

Clatsop County voters should decline to sign the petition that would force a recall vote on Rep. Tiffiny Mitchell. A recall will be expensive, and if it succeeds it will result in a representative appointed by county commissioners — we won't get to vote on the replacement. And Mitchell doesn't deserve a recall.

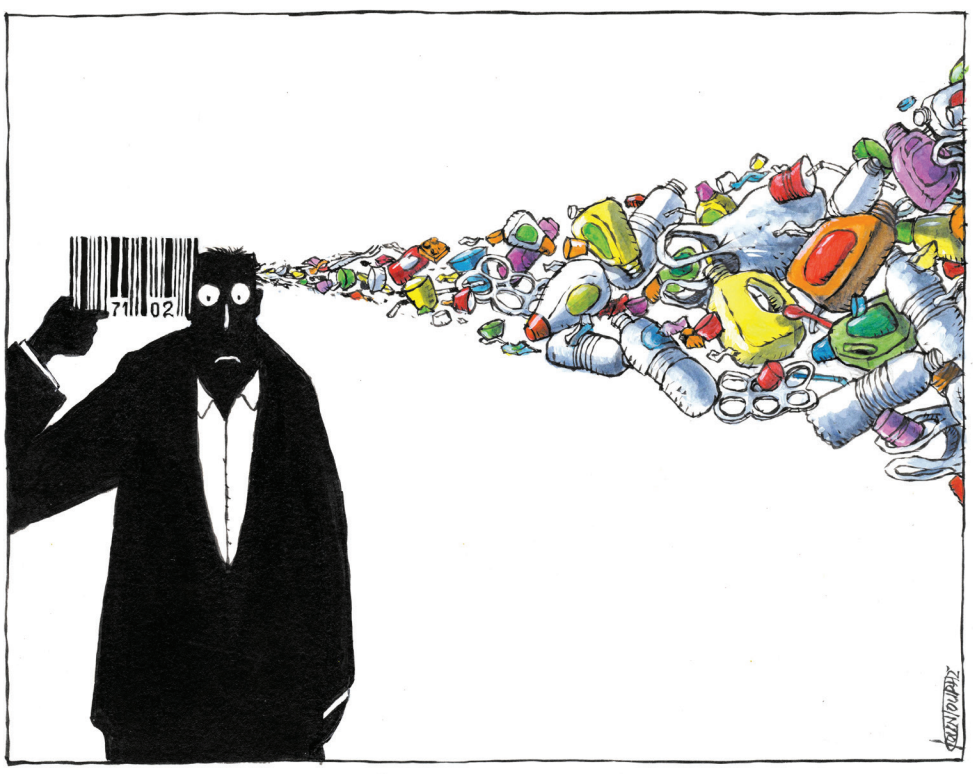
Recalls should be used to remove corrupt officials. No matter what you think about her voting record, Tiffiny Mitchell has honorably served our community. She's always been accessible to her constituents, and upfront and honest about where she stands. Even the organizers of this recall cannot point to a single instance of corruption or illegal activity by Rep Mitchell.

Voters should recognize that signing the recall petition could cost all of us a lot of money. More than $50,000 of our tax dollars would have to be diverted to pay for a special election.

If the expensive recall effort succeeds, there won't be another vote for a replacement. Instead, county commissioners — not voters — will decide and pick our next state representative.

No matter how you feel about Tiffiny Mitchell's votes, she was elected by the people of the North Coast, and this recall will circumvent the will of the voters and take our choice away.

SCOTT LEE
Astoria



A rare commodity

I was mystified by comments made by attorney Blair Henningsgaard for the article on the Linn County timber lawsuit ("Counties win $1 billion timber suit," The Astorian, Nov. 21).

He was told, by someone, that the Clatsop County commisssion's decision to opt out of the lawsuit was a "political statement," which he likens to the commission "having a tantrum," then "what they're saying is we're not going to tell you what we think." His remarks seem off the cuff.

I am not interested in parsing words with Henningsgaard, but a political statement is made to sway opinion toward a particular political point of view. It is not a temper tantrum, and instead of trying to conceal what the person or organization thinks, it is intended to make their position very clear.

Those who attended the final commission meeting on the lawsuit heard the lengthy and cogent statement by Chairman Scott Lee, justifying his vote. He pointed out that the commission has supported balanced forest management since its inception in 1998, and that "the overwhelming message from public testimony (was) in favor of balanced forest management and against the Linn County lawsuit."

There is no defiance of logic in the commission's vote, as Henningsgaard asserts. Neither is it political, since all of the other 13 counties had already indicated that they would pursue the lawsuit.

The vote was based on an increasingly rare commodity in our country, principle. The commission upheld principle over the pursuit of money, which is perhaps illogical to some lawyers.

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria

What win?

The lead article in The Astorian on Nov. 23 focused on Clatsop County's decision to opt out of a $1 billion class-action lawsuit against the state ("Clatsop County's decision to opt out of timber suit under microscope").

A recent court finding that the state breached its contract for logging "an insufficient amount of timber from state forests" was costing the participating counties revenue. The article correctly stated that Clatsop County was the only eligible county out of 14 to opt out.

There was overwhelming public support in the county to opt out. Scott Lee, the county Board of Commissioners chairman at the time, said it made little sense to join a suit that prioritized logging interests over all other interests, such as environmental and social values like clean water and recreation.

A headline saying "Counties win $1 billion timber suit" was misleading. Since it was a Circuit Court ruling, it will most likely be followed by years of appeals, up to the Oregon Supreme Court level. Meanwhile, the lawyers representing the counties will continue to collect their fees, which the participating counties and other taxing districts are obliged to pay.

I see the decision to opt out as a big win for Clatsop County. It is not obligated to pay lawyer fees for an indeterminate time.

Also, as the largest producer of timber in the state, it took a principled stand, not denying the ongoing value of logging to our economy and society, but also recognizing other important values. In this time of climate disruption, these other values are more important than ever.

CAROLYN EADY
Astoria