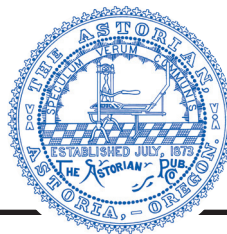


# OPINION



# the Astorian

editor@dailyastorian.com

Founded in 1873

**KARI BORGEN**  
Publisher

**DERRICK DePLEDGE**  
Editor

**JEREMY FELDMAN**  
Circulation Manager

**JOHN D. BRUIJN**  
Production Manager

**CARL EARL**  
Systems Manager

## OUR VIEW

# Port confronts a cruise ship conflict

One of the bright spots at the Port of Astoria over the past decade is the emergence of cruise ships.

Cruise ships have stopped in Astoria since the early 1980s, but, over the past several years, the port of call has become an attraction for leisure travel in the Puget Sound, Alaska and Vancouver, British Columbia, markets. Up to 35 cruise ships with 75,000 passengers could arrive this year, a schedule weighted toward the spring and fall shoulder seasons for tourism on the North Coast.

While some local retailers question the economic value and complain passengers are not typically big spenders, the Port has correctly identified cruise ships as an opportunity. The Port's strategic plan discusses the need for dock and other infrastructure improvements to keep pace with the cruise ship industry's trend toward larger ships that carry more passengers.

Bruce Conner, the Port's cruise ship marketer, deserves credit for his work in building this business. He is also the cruise ship marketer for Humboldt Bay in California and has a leadership role with Cruise the West, a partnership that promotes travel to several West Coast ports.

But Conner also operates Sundial Travel in Astoria, so he has had a private financial interest in growing Astoria as a cruise ship destination. His travel company offers shoreside excursions to passengers that are booked from the cruise lines.

The Port should have long ago recognized this conflict of interest.

Instead, rival tour operators forced the Port's hand by calling attention to what appeared to be Conner's preferential treatment.

Lori Beth Kulp, of Lor's Tours, complained to the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. After reviewing the situation, the Ethics Commission determined that Conner kept his public and private interests separate and voted in 2018 to dismiss Kulp's complaint.

Last year, after a complaint from Kulp's attorney,



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

**The Coral Princess, carrying up to 3,000 people, cruises beneath the Astoria Bridge before anchoring in the Columbia River in September.**

ney, the Ethics Commission took another look. An investigation found that Conner used his official position with the Port to support his travel company and failed to properly disclose the conflict of interest. He took "official actions such as posting descriptions of his company's shore excursions on the Port of Astoria's website and communicating with cruise line shore excursion managers to gain support for a Port of Astoria policy that had the effect of prohibiting other tour operators from competing."

Conner eventually settled and paid a

\$3,500 penalty.

We don't know why it took other tour operators and an ethics investigation for the Port to figure this out. At one point, Jim Knight, the Port's former executive director, even said the agency's policy regarding tour operators — which obviously favored Conner — was driven by the cruise lines. "One of the reasons we've been so successful with cruise ships is making sure tours are sold on board," Knight said in 2018. "This is how cruise companies make money."

The ethics investigation turned up an email from Port counsel Eileen Eakins to Knight recommending the Port consider terminating Conner's marketing contract. She wrote that Conner "is not only being paid by the Port, but the work he is doing for the Port will have the direct effect of increasing tour sales for his company."

Fortunately, the Port's new leadership appears to grasp the problem.

Last year, the Port reached a new professional services agreement with Conner that specifies he "shall not directly promote or market any specific company, person, or business in which contractor or any relative of contractor has a personal financial interest."

In January, the Port detailed a new lease with Conner as cruise ship marketer that separates him from Clatsop Cruise Hosts, the volunteers who welcome cruise ship passengers.

Will Isom, the Port's executive director, chose to announce the new lease publicly at a Port Commission meeting. "This is not something, per our bylaws, that would need to go in front of the commission or would need approval," he said. "I did think it was important from a transparency standpoint based on the recent ethics investigation and things like that that have gone on, that we did make this public."

We hope other local government agencies learn from the Port's mistakes and take steps to avoid potential conflicts of interest before they become too obvious to ignore.

*WE HOPE OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES LEARN FROM THE PORT'S MISTAKES AND TAKE STEPS TO AVOID POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST BEFORE THEY BECOME TOO OBVIOUS TO IGNORE.*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Wake-up call

Like many other residents of Oregon's rural communities, the 2019 legislative session in Salem was something of a wake-up call for me. Observing the actions and words of our elected officials, I quickly realized we are no longer able to trust that our local government understands, reflects and defends our area's unique assets, communities and economic drivers.

I first became interested in running for the Clatsop County commission when my opponent, Kathleen Sullivan, supported the damaging cap-and-trade policy proposed in Salem that will spike fuel prices and destroy local industry. If local industry suffers, we will lose jobs and natural resource tax revenue, meaning reduced funds for infrastructure and school districts.

Fishing, forestry and farming continue to make up a majority of our county's revenue. The forest industry alone serves as the main source of income for over 1,300 Clatsop County families. Local government officials should be concerned first and foremost with the needs of their local residents. Any agenda that is not in the best interests of our county has no place here.

I became even more concerned with Sullivan's position after reading a piece on OregonLive.com dated Jan. 8 that indicated a draft of the cap-and-trade bill would allow rural counties to opt-in to the bill's mandates. Clatsop County voters deserve representation that will choose to protect them from this devastating agenda.

You can read more about my campaign and this issue at courtneybangs.com  
COURTNEY BANGS  
Astoria

### Humans are flexible

Regarding the recent editorial, "Farmers right to be skeptical" (The Astorian, Jan. 7): The last paragraph states, "We don't know anyone who is against saving the whales or the salmon if the real human costs and impacts can be realisti-

cally addressed. Count us as skeptical that could ever be the case."

While the meaning of the paragraph is not entirely clear, it appears to be saying that whales and salmon should be saved only if efforts to breach dams aren't too costly, and don't seriously impact the livelihood of humans. This is the same short-sighted argument put forth by our administration in Washington, D.C., along with the oil and gas and coal industries, to justify doing as little as possible to address climate warming.

Humans are flexible. Farmers, barge operators, deck hands and dock workers, those most impacted by dam breaching on the Columbia and Snake rivers, can work elsewhere or change careers to meet the challenges of a changing environment. Perhaps not great options for these workers, but at least humans have choices. Unfortunately, salmon and whales do not.

The editorial states, "The loudest proponents of breaching the dams seem to have the least personally at stake." The unfortunate flipside to this is that the least loudest proponents of breaching the dams have the most personally at stake — their very existence.

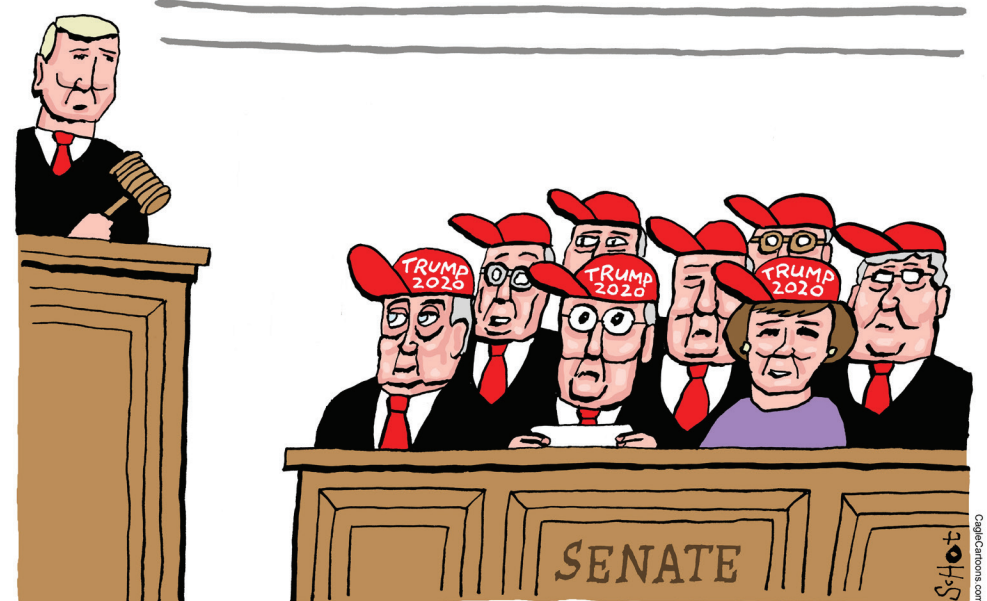
ED JOYCE  
Astoria

### Conservation commitments

Regarding the Oregon Forest Practices Act revision: The Oregon Department of Forestry is almost entirely dependent on timber sales for funding. It's a volatile revenue stream which it can't control, and is affected by market swings, political agendas and legal challenges.

The ODF gets no taxpayer money, but is asked to provide services which cost millions of dollars annually, and generate little or no revenue. As two-thirds of the revenue from timber sales go to the 15 counties and special taxing districts where the logging takes place, little is left to fund the ODF operations.

After reading and reviewing the draft, it's not clear in the proposed forest practices plan how the stated aims will inter-



### IMPEACHMENT JURY TRIAL

sect with other goals, such as maximizing the volume of wood available for harvest, and maximizing wildlife habitat for native wildlife species. Nor is it protective of streams or watersheds.

The ODF mandate is to manage the public land for the "greatest permanent value" to Oregon. Yet the definition of value, and to whom it should go, is a controversial question. Under the current plan, water quality, salmon and wildlife have suffered.

The ODF must clearly identify improved conservation outcomes in specific terms within the plan, and identify which measures enhance habitat for species of concern.

The plan must include unambiguous conservation commitments, such as precise amounts of complex forest to be developed, specific stream strategies with buffer distances increased, and practices identified.

PAMELA MATTSON McDONALD  
Astoria

### High-density residential?

Pacific Seafood Group plans to fit 125 workers and building employees into a building designed for 30, with only 18 private parking spaces ("Pacific Seafood eyes

Astoria Pointe for worker housing," The Astorian, Jan. 11). Is the facility equipped to handle that many?

Barbara Fryer, Astoria city planner, stated that a conditional use permit depends on parking and how to accommodate traffic. Where is the public parking that company has offered to invest in, in lieu of providing private parking?

I live across the street. I have two public parking spaces in front of my house where, when there were only 30 patients at Astoria Pointe (in house), the workers alone sometimes overran the street parking, blocking access to my home's gate and garage, and partially parking into the road, shrinking the width of the road.

Also, I have had people entering my fenced yard, stealing prized possessions, and returning the next day to finish the job.

The article in The Astorian stated the company would remove troublesome employees. How will they find them?

I don't believe "high-density residential" includes an additional 125-plus people.

For anyone who's interested, there's a Traffic Safety Advisory Committee meeting to discuss this parking issue at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday at Astoria City Hall.

RICK VANDERBURG  
Astoria