

OPINION

theAstorian

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GUEST COLUMN

Our pets deserve better

Now in his early 70s, Daniel Koller should want to be known to us as a veterinarian who dedicated his life to relieving the pain of animals and to contributing to their fitness and well-being.

His life narrative, however, runs in the opposite direction. Using his veterinary credentials as an emblem of trust, he got close to animals and turned out, at least in some cases, to be their persecutor rather than their protector.

When licensed in California in late June 1974, he allegedly slapped and punched “Coco” the dog in the face when she wouldn’t stop barking. It’s reported that he repeatedly slammed a Siamese cat feet first on the table, until its injured paws bled profusely. After a German shepherd bit him, according to an additional report, Koller hung the dog off the ground and over a few days kicked and beat it to death.

That’s just for starters. Over the next 30 years, Koller was accused of a chilling string of abuses against animals who’d been brought to him for healing. His California license was finally revoked in 2005. After multiple violations of the Controlled Substances Act, including providing his wife with an injectable veterinary narcotic that almost killed her, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, citing a “stunning disregard for the requirements of federal law,” revoked Koller’s license to dispense medications in 2006.

Koller made his way north, to the Beaverton outlet of low-cost Companion Pet Clinics, which Koller and some partners had started in 1983. There he continued his practice, and the accusations continued to pile up. His Oregon license was suspended in 2010 after the DEA withdrew his license, but Oregon reinstated Koller in 2015. At this writing, Koller has once again been charged in Oregon with two counts of animal abuse and two counts of aggravated animal abuse, to which he has pleaded not guilty.

The question is, how was a man with this kind of unmistakable record of hurting animals allowed to operate as a licensed veterinarian for decades? Why is he still licensed to practice in Oregon through 2020? Why haven’t California and Oregon authorities acted more decisively to keep animals out of his clutches?

Indeed, a wealth of information about Koller can be found on California’s Veterinary Medical Board website. A search for Koller there brings up links to every board decision and order since 1977. Yet the website of the Oregon Veterinary Medical Examining Board offers only the most minimal information about its licensees. A search there provides a license number, name, address and the notation “disciplinary finding” contains no substantive information that would alert a pet owner to the sort of malpractice that became all too common for Koller.

A Facebook page has been set up to share information about Koller and the pet clinics. So there’s information to be had, but often no way to evaluate its veracity or credibility. How is it that one



Elaine Thompson/AP Photo
University of Washington School of Medicine researcher Daniel Promislow, the principal investigator of the Dog Aging Project grant, rubs the head of his elderly dog ‘Frisbee’ at their home in Seattle.

state continues to license a veterinarian after so many horrendous violations, and a final revocation, in another state?

There are dozens of different sets of laws governing veterinary medicine across America, ranging from full disclosure to virtually none. In some cases, even criminal violations can be scrubbed from a licensee’s record. We should be able to access relevant, timely, neutral, official information on state licensing board sites.

Pet owners should not have to do probing research to make sure that a treatable animal can get out alive from a veterinary clinic or hospital.

State veterinary authorities should be the first line of consumer defense and animal welfare, considering instances of malfeasance from a prior state. When the transgressions rise to life-threatening

mistreatment or outright cruelty, oversight boards should deny a veterinary license or, if there is some extenuating circumstance, the perpetrator should be put through a rigorous process to reclaim a license and demonstrate that he or she has turned the corner and warranted licensure.

At the same time, state authorities should make damaging information available to customers through accessible portals, so they can judge for themselves if they want to patronize that individual’s clinic.

As a matter of animal welfare and consumer protection, this is the least we can do.

Joshua Marquis is director of legal affairs at Animal Wellness Action (www.animalawareness.org). He is a former Clatsop County district attorney.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Report card

After the Cannery Pier Hotel & Spa was purchased, I wrote a letter to Vesta Hospitality, a Vancouver, Washington, management firm. From their website, there was obvious disparity between Robert “Jake” Jacob’s management, closely tied to Astoria’s community, and Vesta’s, focused on profits for its “stakeholders.”

Surprisingly, I did receive a response from Vesta, reassuring me that they truly understand the community of Astoria and the legacy created by Jacob. I did notice that where I talked about “community,” they substituted “guest experience.”

Time for a report card: Long-term employees forced out or given reduced hours at reduced pay, with those remaining expected to do the same work in less time, while training replacements. Now the firing of the entire spa staff because they resisted reduced pay. The complimentary wine and cheese will probably go, as a bar is installed.

We were proud of the design and experience in Jacob’s hotel, and told our friends. Vesta’s overwhelming loyalty is to their investors. Employees are disposable and interchangeable.

That’s not the community we are. We’ll no longer recommend this hotel: spread the word!

JAN MITCHELL
Astoria

Common sense

People: What is it about the lack of common sense that seems to dwell in our area with some dog owners?

I love dogs but, when on the beach, do you really think you’re doing a good thing by leaving a plastic bag-o-poop laying in the sand?

I think that after watching a loggerhead turtle almost starve to death, and the sea rescue vets removing several feet of plastic bags from its intestines, it would make you think twice on bringing any plastics to the beach and not taking them home with you.

On the coast here, we now have to pay a nickle for each plastic bag we use. Our landfills and our ocean’s animals here can’t accept much more abuse. Why do we have any plastic bags here at all? Recycled paper bags only, I say.

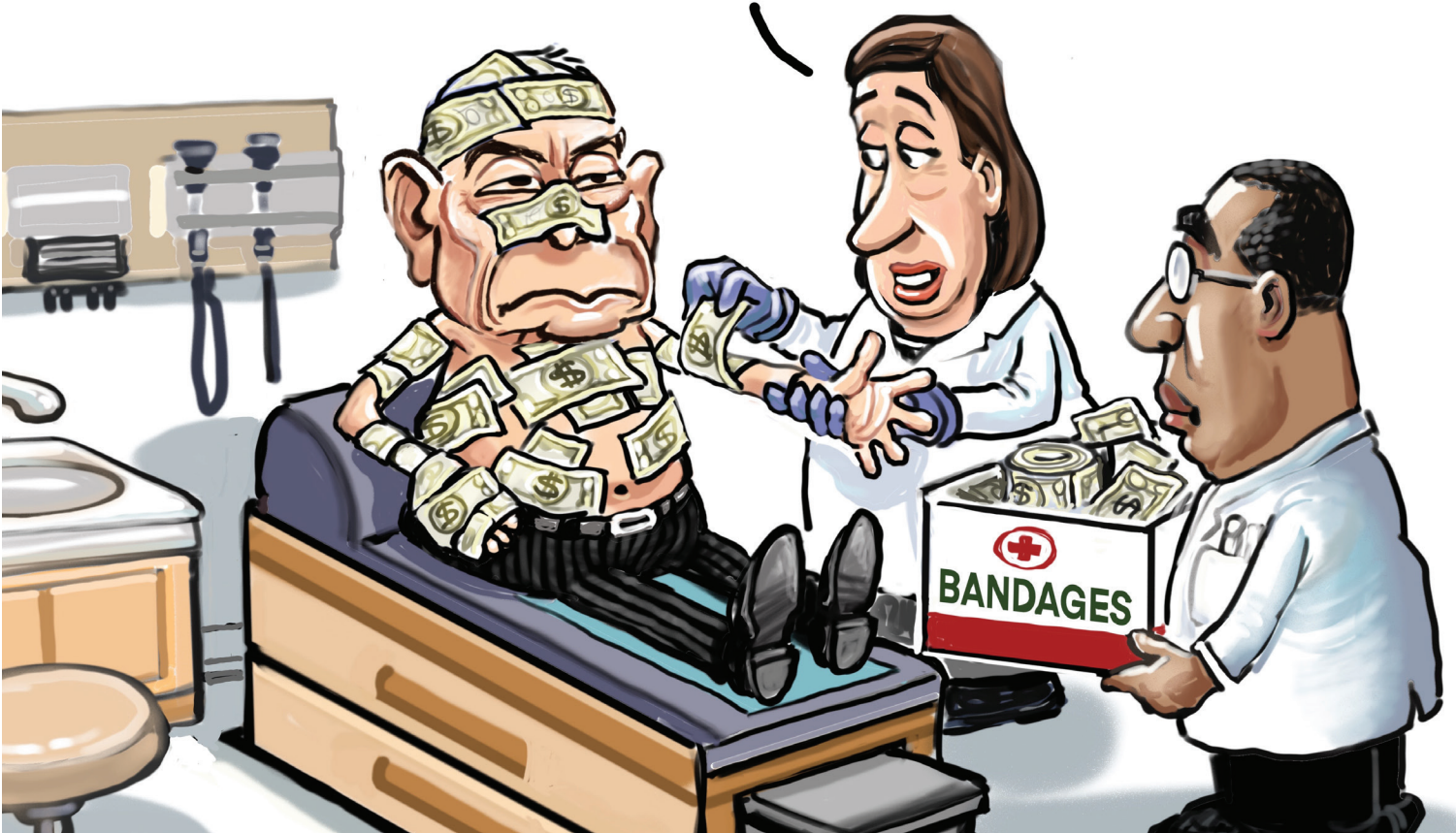
Why make a rule that does absolutely no good for our environment or our sea creatures at all? Why and where does the nickle go? And, is it enough to pay for rescue and care for our ocean critters eating plastic or getting choked in a slow, evil death?

Why do we have plastic in our stores at all? Buy reusable bags, or pay a nickel for a recycled paper bag. I asked for a paper bag at our local grocery store. Not available. Why?

MONICA GUINN
Seaside

STAR TRIBUNE
SACK

OTHER THAN THAT, MR. BLOOMBERG, HOW DID YOU ENJOY THE DEBATE?...



Deeply saddened

Open letter to state Sen. Betsy Johnson: My wife, Cheryl, and I attended the Knappa Foundation dinner and auction this year as usual. Cheryl started her Oregon teaching career at Hilda Lahti Elementary School, and our son and daughter attended Knappa schools. We enjoy connecting with old friends, and I am always glad to donate one of my steel fish to the auction.

We were, however, deeply saddened by your very critical remarks about what state government is doing to blue-collar workers in rural Oregon. I have been a blue-collar worker all my life, and an Oregonian since 1973. We have a deepening problem with climate change that we all need to work together to solve.

The tone of your speech at the dinner only served to fan the flames of a supposed divide between rural and urban people in our state. Instead of asking people to stand up and “show Salem that rural workers are not going to take it anymore,” a better question would have been: “How many people want a sustainable, healthy world for our children and grandchildren?”

Climate change with serious consequences is already here, and is only going to get worse without action on our part.

We need leaders who help solve problems and call on us to work together for solutions. We do not need elected officials who throw gasoline on the fires of divisiveness.

TED MESSING
Astoria

Hotter and hotter

Unfolded the Feb. 8 weekend edition of The Astorian to find the top half of the front page devoted to a full-color headline and report of the big Salem protest against Oregon’s second attempt to pass a cap-and-trade bill, an attempt to address carbon emissions and the global climate catastrophe.

The hashtag #TimberUnity was printed in gigantic green type along with color photos of our own Sen. Betsy Johnson, who joined the Republicans to fight both of the cap-and-trade bills (“#TimberUnity takes center stage”).

Glancing up to the very top of the same front page, I could make out another headline in small red letters: “Flooding inundates Eastern Oregon,” along with a partially obscured photo of 18-wheelers floundering in flood waters on Interstate 84 — the same vehicles that were, the day before, surrounding the state Capitol attempting to prevent Oregon from taking any steps to combat climate change.

The juxtaposition was hilarious: new high-water flooding records set in both Oregon and Washington, at the same time that politicians, fossil fuel industry lobbyists and truck drivers fought tooth and nail to prevent any action to address the obvious climate crisis.

Like the frog in the gradually warming pot of water on the stove, we pretend not to notice that it’s getting hotter and hotter, but since we’re much smarter than a frog, we actively block any attempt to turn down the heat.

JOSEPH STEVENSON
Astoria

#TimberUnity superstar

The photo spoke volumes (“#TimberUnity takes center stage in Salem,” The Astorian, Feb. 8).

Here was state Sen. Betsy Johnson smiling broadly while holding a #TimberUnity placard over her head to the cheering of other TU folks who were in Salem to protest against cap and trade.

Just in case you were wondering if she is actually weighing the many changes to Senate Bill 1530, like a responsible senator would, well, you can forget it. She is a timber industry supporter and apologist through and through, regardless of the damage the industry is currently having on the environment under Oregon’s antiquated Forest Practices Act.

Johnson accepted more than \$100,000-plus in campaign contributions over the years from the timber industry to help keep her in office.

Johnson recently said that she was waiting to see what the managers of the Georgia-Pacific Wauna Mill thought about the changes to SB 1530 before making her decision. Since the controlling interest in the mill is held by the notoriously ultraconservative Koch Industries, that position was never in doubt.

Johnson poses as a thoughtful, nonpartisan Democrat, but a look at her record on divisive issues like gun control and cap and trade reveals that she is a charlatan who does not belong in the Democratic Party.

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria