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Restore the river beneath Amazon’s cloud

By EILEEN DELEHANTY
PEARKES and
GRAEME LEE ROWLANDS

Residents of the Pacific Northwest have a special connection with two of the world’s greatest river systems.

One, the Columbia, begins its 1,243-mile journey in southeastern British Columbia before flowing through eastern Washington, gathering water from Idaho and Montana, forming the Oregon-Washington border, and then plunging into the sea. The other, the Amazon, is a continent away, but shares its name with one of the world’s largest tech companies, headquartered in Seattle.

There has never been a more important time for Northwest residents to plug in to their local watersheds. Many people are aware of debates surrounding the impact of dams on endangered fish and orcas and the proposed restoration of the Lower Snake River. But there is another important process happening further upstream on the Columbia River that also warrants careful attention.

Since 1964, the U.S.-Canada Columbia River Treaty has governed river flows on the Columbia and defined the transboundary relationship between the two countries that share its watershed. Though renegotiations have been underway since 2018, some Americans are agitating for the U.S. to terminate this agreement. Doing so would squander a once-in-a-lifetime chance to collaboratively shape a unified watershed future.

In a recent op-ed in the Seattle Times (“Terminate the other treaty with Canada”) Tom Karier, a professor of economics at Eastern Washington University, describes the treaty as a business contract gone awry, with the U.S. locked into an unfair deal and the federal government unwilling to terminate it. He supports his position by erroneously claiming that the purpose of the treaty was for the U.S. to gradually pay for Canadian dams like a mortgage, in exchange for water storage. Fact check: the treaty was founded on the princi-



Eileen Delehanty Pearkes is the author of ‘A River Captured: The Columbia River Treaty and Catastrophic Change.’



Graeme Lee Rowlands has cycled and paddled the entire length of the Columbia River.

ple of two countries managing the river together and sharing benefits from that management equally.

Historical inaccuracies aside, such a narrow perspective on the river prevents us from seeing the treaty for what it really is: a relationship. The renegotiation of this agreement is an opportunity to reimagine and reshape relationships, not only with our northern neighbors, but also with the river itself.

The original Columbia River Treaty valued the river exclusively for flood control and hydropower efficiency, leaning on Canada to store upstream water in giant reservoirs. The treaty ignored the health of river ecosystems and fish. It failed to involve sovereign indigenous nations. It neglected to consult with residents whose communities were flooded.

Rather than terminate this agreement, we need to continue to work toward a revised treaty that manages the watershed holistically. Negotiators must find a way to share power benefits and pay for flood control that is fair for both countries. A new agreement must also address the threat of climate change, support the restoration of fish to previously blocked areas and add the health of the river as a primary treaty purpose equal to flood control and power production. The U.S. must offer tribes a role in decision-making that is commensurate with their sovereign status, as Canada has done with its First Nations.

Whether you live near the Columbia River or not, it connects us all.

Once among the world’s greatest salmon rivers, it was a free-flowing artery of tremendous natural wealth. Now, the river languishes in a stair-stepped series of reservoirs behind 14 main stem dams, where water flows through turbines that spin power into our region’s grid. Everyday, the Columbia’s

hydropower vibrates in our cellphones and buzzes through thousands of miles of transmission lines that crisscross the Northwest.

Indigenous people hold profound cultural connections to the river and its fish, which go back thousands of years. Even giant tech companies, whose products appear to exist in thin air, depend on the Columbia and its tributaries. Behind the “cloud computing” services offered by Amazon, Microsoft, Google, Apple and others are giant data centers. Many of these climate-controlled computer warehouses are located in the Northwest, to capitalize on the Columbia’s abundant hydroelectricity.

Northwesterners: The Columbia River and the Columbia River Treaty affect our lives in many ways. We can’t afford to let narrow perspectives foreclose on our chance to work together for a shared future.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Compelled

I feel compelled to respond to a recent letter from an ardent President Donald Trump supporter, first lamenting mistruths, and touting the current campaign mantra that Trump has presided over the best economy in decades (“Courage,” The Astorian, March 26). Literally the second coming, vis-a-vis the economy.

If you look at percentage real gross domestic product (GDP) growth numbers, one will see that the last two Barack Obama years (2014-2015) were better than any two Trump years combined. Albeit the difference is small, but nonetheless, it is the truth.

There were also years in George W. Bush’s administration that outdid the recent performance, and they all pale in comparison to the Bill Clinton numbers, that dwarf the last three years. The government actually ran a surplus then. Remember? How soon we forget.

As to veracity: Take a simple message from the last campaign that we were going to build this great, big beautiful wall, and Mexico would pay for it. We all heard it ad nauseam. I’m not sure anyone believed it, but we heard it.

Then, when it came time to build some of the wall, and the administration was scrabbling for the money, our dear leader had the audacity to say he never claimed Mexico was paying for it.

This, for me, is a red line. I would never support any Democrat, Republican or second coming that is so flippant with the truth. It flabbergasts me that so-called evangelicals support this behavior. That is, by no means, the only such instance.

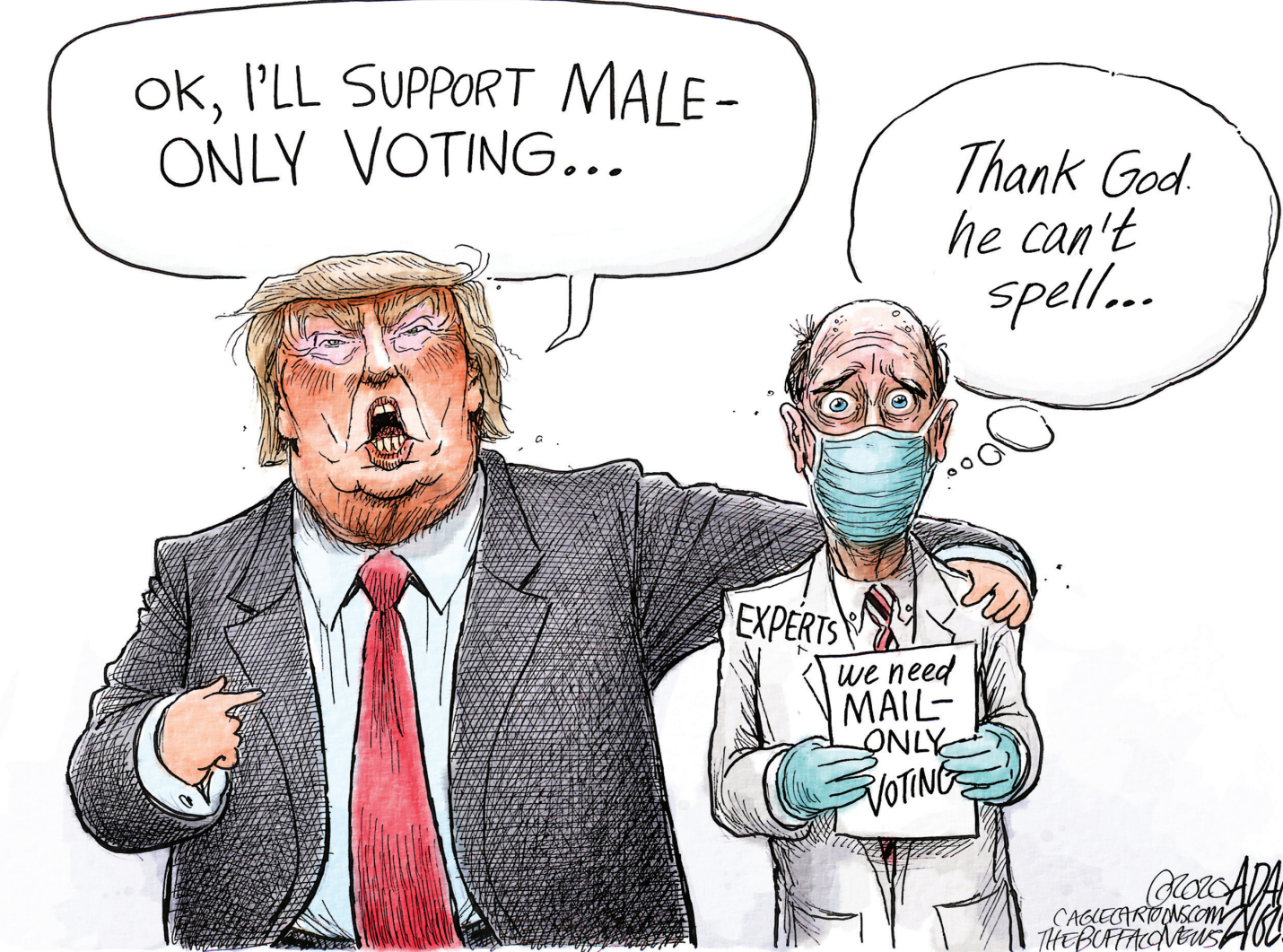
Mr. Republican, Ronald Regan, would be spinning in his grave, watching a Republican president lick the boots of the present communist dictators.

CHRIS CONNAWAY
Astoria

Public health hazard

Just like you can’t falsely yell “fire!” in a crowded movie theater, you can’t falsely yell, “It’s just like the flu!” in the public square of our community newspaper (“Wake up,” The Astorian, April 4).

This coronavirus pandemic is not at all like “any other virus outbreak.” Human beings have never encountered this novel coronavirus before. Novel means that no one has immunity to this virus, and at this time there is no vaccine or treatment. All of us are incredibly vulnerable to the ravages of COVID-19.



Do not listen to the reckless words of Robert Liddycoat, who parrots right-wing propaganda. This does a disservice to us all by undermining the physical distancing and hand-washing hygiene that we must follow in order to defeat the coronavirus. For The Astorian to publish recognized falsehoods is a public health hazard.

It is our moral and patriotic duty to stay home, and save lives. If you won’t do it for yourself, do it for someone you love. Or for the doctors and nurses who will do their best to save you, if you get seriously ill. Or for the first responders who are exposed when coming to your aid. Or because it’s the right thing to do. Stay home. Save lives.

BEBE MICHEL
Gearhart

his base and have free airtime.

He did make one mistake the other day, when he said we should sue the whistleblower’s blank-blank-blank. That was wrong. We, the people, should sue the president’s blank-blank-blank.

DIANE FINUCANE
Warrenton

Hairy primary

Wait a minute. I thought “Live Free or Die” was the state motto of New Hampshire, not Wisconsin (“Wisconsin voters wait for hours, others stay home amid virus,” AP, April 8).

DONNA LEE ROLLINS
Astoria

Ranting

President Donald Trump should stop reading the COVID-19 information others have written for him. He uses this airtime going on and ranting about fake news, insulting the press and people he has fired. He also is telling us how great he is, and tells lies. This program is used to touch

No words

President Donald Trump has blood on his hands. He was way too slow to accept and understand the severity of the coronavirus crisis. We are weeks behind where we should be.

His understating of the problem, along

with Fox News, obviously led to millions of people not taking the threat as seriously as they needed to. Lives were needlessly lost as a result. I hope people have been reading the articles and watching the videos about what the doctors and nurses in New York, Detroit and New Orleans are going through. There are no words.

Perhaps Trump supporters can explain to me why I have not heard President Trump utter a single word acknowledging their heroic efforts against all odds and with woefully inadequate supplies? He is incapable of articulating any human compassion.

President Trump will never highlight his administration’s failings, instead lying to all of us about how close we are to reopening the country. He no doubt will do a victory lap if only 60,000 Americans die from this.

His impatience obviously influences Fox News and millions of others to sweep the virus under the rug as soon as possible. Nothing could not be more dangerous and irresponsible. So please don’t cheerlead the president. The buck stops where it should, with him.

JIM SPURR
Cannon Beach