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GUEST COLUMN

Finding the new normal

Uncertainty about when and how the COVID-19 health and economic crises will end is nearly as distressful for many as the crises themselves.

As many laid off workers still await unemployment checks four weeks after applying, and local businesses grapple with the reality of reduced or completely eliminated revenue, we all wonder, “How long will this last? When will we get back to business as usual?”

Astorians deserve straight answers. The reality is that things won’t return to normal until there is a vaccine approved and widely deployed, which most experts say will take 12 to 18 months. The challenge is to shift mindsets from waiting it out until things return to normal, to adapting to the “new normal.” What does the new normal look like?

The consensus favors a staggered economic reopening driven by data. Once infections have peaked, then steadily subsided for over 14 days (the maximum incubation period), limited reopenings, with restrictions on types of activities and physical distancing, will be considered. Determining factors will include the availability — now lacking — of testing to detect outbreaks, trained contact tracers, as well as adequate personal protective equipment and hospital surge capacity.

Resurgences of infections may trigger renewed restrictions in affected areas and businesses where physical distancing is difficult. Wild cards include finding and approving a therapeutic drug treatment. The availability of treatment would give confidence to further reopen and allow larger public gatherings despite the increased risk of infection.

Full economic activity with no restrictions on gatherings, however, is unlikely without a vaccine. Until then, beloved activities like July 4 fireworks, the Astoria Regatta, the Astoria Sunday Market, sports and festivals, and private gather-



BRUCE JONES



Safety precautions for the coronavirus at the Astoria Co-op.

Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

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ings may remain scaled down or canceled altogether.

Restaurants and taverns will resume inside service with reduced seating and other restrictions — it won’t be “business as usual.” Museums like my employer will likely have reduced admissions during our peak revenue months — or be forced to close again.

The rate and scale of economic recovery will be a function of 1) advances in our ability to monitor the virus’s spread; 2) hospital capacity; 3) continued federal and state assistance to the unemployed and affected businesses; 4) development of a therapeutic treatment; and 5) consumer confidence — our collective willingness to travel, go out and participate in normal activities again without undue fear of contracting COVID-19.

We are in the early stages of a pro-

tracted challenge with many variables that no one at the local, state or federal levels fully understands. Response efforts can fairly be compared to changing the tires on a moving car.

Not all businesses are closed, and not all employees laid off; the economic damage and suffering are not shared equally. For many, aid is not enough and has not come quickly enough, but given the enormity of the aid packages and numbers of unemployed, those employees charged with processing and distributing aid should be commended for their tireless, thankless work.

Local community organizations like Clatsop Economic Development Resources and the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce, as well as elected leaders, regularly press local needs on our state and federal elected

representatives as they legislate aid packages, and aid is beginning to flow (though as of this writing the Paycheck Protection Program has just been fully depleted).

This crisis is evolving rapidly and we are all learning together. It will be a marathon, and we should prepare for the long haul, with a sober awareness of the implications of state revenue shortfalls measured in the billions over the coming few years.

Once we wrap our heads around the concept that it may be October 2021 before “business as usual” is possible, organizations and programs that are to survive and even do well in the interim will focus on innovation, collaboration and modifying business models to deliver what COVID-19 customers need and want, maintain customer loyalty and even throw in a little fun for fun-deprived Astorians.

Like our schools, which have quickly transitioned to remote learning, and medical providers to telehealth, many local restaurants and taverns and other businesses are already embracing adaptive behavior to continue operating. Unfortunately and realistically, though, adapting will be harder for some organizations than others, for a variety of structural reasons.

In the end, Astoria will survive COVID-19, and thrive once again. The long-term goal is that we are all still here to take part in Astoria’s post-COVID-19 rejuvenation, and that we don’t have to build a memorial wall to honor those who died during the pandemic.

In the meantime, we salute the many essential workers — public and private sector — keeping us fed, supplied, functioning and protected, all of the public who have thus far so successfully minimized the virus’s spread through the community, those who have generously given charitably and supported local businesses still open and the shuttered businesses and laid off workers who have borne the brunt of the economic distress thus far.

Bruce Jones is mayor of Astoria and deputy director of the Columbia River Maritime Museum.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thumbs-up

In our country, no one has to vote. It’s not a requirement of citizenship, but it is a privilege of being an American.

So what do you get for exercising this privilege? For one thing, a good feeling for ringing the Liberty Bell. Come on, you feel better when you vote, don’t you? I do. It’s fun.

A second is that while true, your one vote alone probably won’t improve your situation, it’s also true that if enough people vote, it will cause the government to listen, because officials will either realize making that situation better is the right thing, or because the want to be reelected, or both. Who cares which, as long as the results better people’s lives. Right?

We have local elections coming up in May. Maybe now is a good time to practice for the big one Nov. 3.

If you need to register, call 503-325-8605, or go online to sos.oregon.gov/voting. The deadline is April 28.

Registering to vote will get you a thumbs-up from the Founding Fathers. Voting will get you a high five, and that’s a really big deal because the Founding Fathers pledged their fortunes and their lives on this fledgling democracy surviving.

Patrick Henry emphatically proclaimed, “Give me liberty, or give me death.” Voting is also one way to honor those who fought to protect our liberties.

So when your ballot arrives, maybe take a minute, and think of a few more reasons I haven’t mentioned, and what a privilege voting is.

CARL DOMINEY
Astoria

Out of the box

Out-of-the-box suggestions have been suggested countrywide. Here are mine:

Some people are super-spreaders, i.e. carrying and spreading the coronavirus but are not ill. I’ve never heard of a disease that jumps children. Could kids be the super-spreaders?

Why aren’t temperatures taken from everyone before entering each grocery store door, big and small, including gas stations. Each person must give their telephone numbers and address.

Ditto for large pharmacies. No excep-

tions. Then people would get interviewed if they were ill.

The National Guard needs to be deployed and trained to test everyone in rural areas. Here, that will be most citizens. People are furious with President Donald Trump.

Those needing food or medicine should be able to get it delivered to their door the same day. Checks, cash and other means should be accepted, including IOUs.

This is an opportunity for full employment. There will need to be trainers, delivery of food and meds, taking temperatures, background checks, swabs to labs and lots more. Whoever works gets \$15 an hour.

Ill people, or those living alone, are particularly vulnerable. Background checks are essential for all workers, even temps. So are tests for workers. People have a right to know if they have the virus.

President Trump apparently despises hearing that numbers are going up. Who cares, since he lies to the citizenry at will.

Let’s stop this virus.

G. MCGREGOR
Warrenton

Begging

I must respond to a recent letter regarding the temptation to write in an alternate candidate for president in the 2020 election (“Will of the people,” The Astorian, April 11).

I am begging you please, please do not do this. This will assure another four years of this autocrat. At this time, we cannot afford that luxury. Democrats must win by a landslide or President Donald Trump will claim the election was rigged, refuse to leave — then think Venezuela.

Our democracy is slipping away, and we must stop it. Trump is packing the courts with right-wing judges, firing staff who don’t agree with his ideology, told thousands of lies, and it continues during this crisis.

He’s cut funding for crucial departments, hence the slow response to this pandemic. Joe Biden is our choice. He wasn’t my choice, either, but so be it. I will vote for him to get rid of the bigger problem.

Biden has committed to picking a female vice president, so the goal of getting a woman in the White House moves closer, since he has not committed to running a second term.

Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Amy



Klobuchar and Kamala Harris must stay in the U.S. Senate, which we need as much as the White House. Their highest and best use is to stay where they are.

Once we win in November, then we can address other important issues. Let’s all pull together as patriots, and get rid of this egomaniac con man in the White House now. Our government is not a reality TV show. Please think about it.

BONNIE LIVELY
Astoria

Primary vote?

Are you ready to vote in the May primary election? Not if you are registered as a nonaffiliated voter in Oregon.

Thanks to the guest column by Andy Davis, he alerted us to the fact there are more nonaffiliated registered voters than either of the major political parties in Clatsop County (“Choose a party for the primary,” The Astorian, April 4).

Nonaffiliated voters do not get to vote in primary elections. So, April 28 will be the last date to update your registration by choosing a political party.

You may update in two ways: fill out a registration form at the county elections office in the Clatsop County Building at 820 Exchange St. in Astoria; or by computer at sos.oregon.gov/voting

Even if you are already registered, you should update your registration if you have moved and have a new mailing address (not a P.O. box), or changed your name

since the last election in 2016.

We vote by mail in Oregon. Every vote counts.

JUANITA PRICE
Astoria

Smoky haze

Most Astoria residents are not as aware of the North Coast Range as those of us who live on the South Slope. The north face of the range is visible from my kitchen window, from Saddle Mountain in the east to the Astoria Regional Airport in the west, a distance of 12 to 13 miles. It can also be seen from Olney Road, i.e. Oregon Highway 202 along Youngs Bay.

On clear days, there is usually a smoky haze over this entire area. In the morning, or when the wind is not too strong, it is possible to see the exact location where the smoky haze is originating. It is caused by burning slash or from aerial spraying of herbicides on timberland, all in the interest of maximizing investors’ profits by reducing labor costs.

The practices described here are occurring all along the Coast Range, from Astoria to southern Oregon. With the threat of the coronavirus, which attacks the victims’ lungs, this activity should no longer be tolerated. Join me in urging Gov. Kate Brown to issue an executive order which would declare a moratorium on this activity for the welfare of Oregon residents.

CAROLYN EADY
Astoria