OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Boothe-Schmidt, Weber for state House

State Rep. Tiffiny Mitchell's decision to bow out just before the filing deadline in March upended state House District 32.

The Astoria Democrat, elected in 2018, has had an eventful time in Salem. She took difficult votes on cap and trade and pension reform, faced a recall drive from #TimberUnity and even donated a kidney.

While Mitchell was still learning her way politically, we were impressed she did not hide from tough questions, either from us or voters at town halls.

Her choice not to run for reelection — her husband is taking a job in Washington state — created an open seat in a district that covers Clatsop and swaths of Tillamook and Washington counties.

FuturePAC, the campaign arm of House Democrats, quickly pivoted to Debbie Boothe-Schmidt, a trial assistant with Clatsop County, for the May primary.

George Kiepke, a former Clatsop County commissioner, also entered the primary at the last minute.

On the Republican side, Tillamook Mayor Suzanne Weber is facing Vineeta Lower, an online educator in Seaside who lost to Mitchell two years ago.

The coronavirus pandemic interrupted life at a time when the candidates would have been out campaigning, depriving voters of many opportunities to make side-by-side comparisons.

The candidates agreed to interviews via GoToMeeting with The Astorian's editorial board.

Our criteria for state House is more pragmatic than partisan. We believe legislators who represent rural areas have a greater responsibility to serve as advocates for their districts, not ideologues for their political parties.

People who live in the Portland metro area have multiple legislators looking out for their interests in the state House. The North Coast has one.

We want someone who can find ways to be effective no matter which party or faction is in power in Salem.

Democratic primary

We endorse Boothe-Schmidt.

Her experience in government and small business gives her the potential to balance competing interests. She works as a trial assistant for the district attorney's office and has been active with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. She is the co-owner of Phog Bounders Antique Mall in Astoria.

Debbie Boothe-Schmidt

Last year, she was elected to the board of the Sunset Empire Transportation District, the county's bus system. She serves as the board chairwoman.

Her priorities are housing, health care and job growth.

"I want to go to Salem. I want to do a good job," she said. "I want to make sure that the North Coast is getting what we need and what our working families deserve."

Boothe-Schmidt says she believes climate change is impacting the environment but said she does not know how she would have voted on cap and trade, an issue that dominated the past two legislative sessions.

Her indecision is distressing. Anyone running for state House or Senate should be able to say publicly where they stand on this topic.

We're also concerned about her independence, given her union background representing government workers and the fact she was hand-picked by House Democrats to step in after Mitchell's exit.

We hope, if she wins the primary, she will craft a more detailed and well-rounded message for the November election.

Kiepke, a retired maintenance supervisor, moved back to the county a few years ago after living in Utah. He served on the county commission two decades ago and is well-versed in public policy, but his relevant experience is dated.

He said he does not like the direction of politics and believes he would be a unifying voice that could break some of the stalemates in Salem. He would have voted "no" on cap and trade, which he views as an unfair burden on businesses and taxpayers.

Republican primary

We endorse Weber.

The retired elementary school teacher has served for the past decade as the mayor of Tillamook. She was elected mayor after several years on the Tillamook City Council. She has also helped run a cake and catering business and a retail store with her sister-in-law.

Her experience as an elected official in a nonpartisan office, along with the kind of determination small-town mayors often need to be heard at the county and state levels, could prepare her well for a state House controlled by Democrats.

Suzanne Weber

Asked to name a project she is proud of, Weber pointed to her help luring a Pelican Brewing taproom and production facility to Tillamook in 2013, a catalyst for growth downtown.

"If you want something done, and you feel that you have the passion for it, and you have the ability to get it done, and you see that there is a deficit, it's your responsibility to step up and take part in that," she said of her decision to run for state House.

Weber would have voted against cap and trade, calling the legislation "a travesty" that would have led to higher fuel costs and harmed North Coast industries that depend on trucking to get products to market.

While we were supportive of the new version of cap and trade this year, we share concerns about the potentially disproportionate effect on rural counties.

We are less encouraged by some of Weber's predictably dogmatic views on taxes and government regulation and her reliance on tagging North Coast Democrats with a "Portland agenda."

The rhetoric might sound persuasive, but Democrats have held House District 32 since 2002 for a reason. Weber's best argument is that she could be effective in working both sides of the aisle for the district's benefit.

Lower, an English teacher for an online school, lost a close race to Mitchell two years ago. She continues to show a commitment to local issues in her community, serving on the Seaside Transportation Advisory Commission and the Seaside Tree Board.

She describes herself as a conservative Republican who would prioritize lower taxes, the Second Amendment, veterans, the timber industry and parental rights against mandatory vaccination. She would have voted against cap and trade.

Her agenda, in our view, is too partisan and would marginalize the North Coast's voice in Salem.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Lessons

My suggestion for parents struggling with home schooling is to give your children a lesson in civics, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

DONNA LEE ROLLINS
Astoria

Same view

I, too, live on the South Slope, and share the same view of Saddle Mountain and Youngs Bay, so it surprised me to see a letter published in this paper claiming hazy air in the Coast Range was caused by slash burning and herbicide spraying in our forests ("Smoky haze," The Astorian, April 18).

It all sounded odd to me. As a former soldier, firefighter and lifelong resident, I have a pretty good understanding of what smoke looks like up close, and also from a distance, through various natural elements of the North Coast.

Not one to assume, I checked with the skilled professionals that are active in managing our forest. Sure enough, it was easy to ascertain that no major forestland owner was burning, the fire risk was already too high. Also, it was made clear that applying herbicide in such a way that it would linger in the air, and be visible from a distance, as stated in the letter would likely be illegal, but also borderline impossible.

It seems some in our community may be being misled by the organizers of a statewide political campaign seeking to capitalize on the current health crisis. If you see what you believe to be haze from smoke or herbicide, why not ask our Department of Forestry?

Also, if you hear something that sounds that strange, why not reach out to one of the thousands of our neighbors who work in the forest every day, and ask them if any burning or spraying is taking place.

KATY PRITCHARD
Astoria

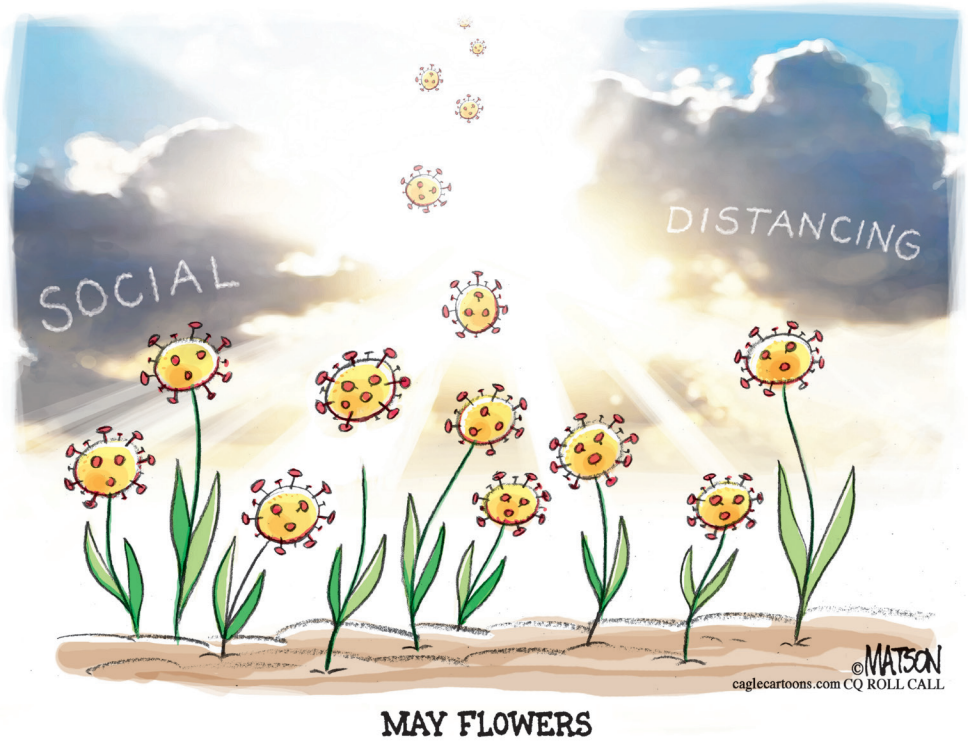
Me too

I'm setting my begging bowl alongside Bonnie Lively's ("Begging," The Astorian April 18). I would vote for Elizabeth Warren if I believed she had any chance of winning. But she doesn't, and a protest vote will only enhance the chance of continuing the reign of His Majesty The Trump.

Even if the Democrats were to win a majority in the Senate, a staunch Republican minority could block any measure that didn't suit them. That, combined with President Donald Trump's veto pen, and we'd be no better off than we are today.

Pick your fights well. A Democratic president combined with a Democratic Senate and House — now that's when things can happen.

JULIE SNYDER
Astoria



MAY FLOWERS

Noteworthy

The Astorian published three noteworthy pieces in the April 21 edition. First was an article about the impact of climate change on agriculture in the Northwest; two others were columns about the commitment by EO Media Group (owners of The Astorian) to continue to write about climate issues. Credit is due to The Astorian for this critically important journalism.

We have heard President Donald Trump say many times that he wants the cleanest air and the cleanest water. His actions contradict his words. Under his watch, the Environmental Protection Agency has become the Environmental Pollution Agency, run by advocates for the oil, gas and coal industries. They have undone decades of protections for public health, and their actions contribute to climate change.

Earth Day 2020 has just passed, and we are currently overwhelmed by a global viral public health crisis. But we must realize that global climate change is also a public health crisis, and the path forward to solving both is the same path. The theme of a recent town hall webinar by U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici was spot on: The Green Road to Recovery. We must start to rebuild our economy with infrastructure jobs that conserve energy and stop greenhouse gas pollution.

Please consider that every day is Earth Day, and especially, Election Day is Earth Day. President Trump is failing us on both the environment and the pandemic. On Nov. 3, let's say to Trump the very words he made famous as a reality TV show host: "You're fired."

ERIC HALPERIN
Gearhart

Heedless

I'm including below a letter I wrote to the Seaside mayor and City Council members after reading the article on Saturday about Seaside's City Council voting on May 11 to reopen beaches, trails and hotels ahead of the rest of the county and state ("Seaside to vote on reopening beaches," The Astorian, May 2).

I was shocked that they would be so heedless of their residents' health and the rest of the coastal communities who are so closely connected. I urge all of you to submit your thoughts to this council, regardless of whether you live in Seaside or not. The letter is as follows:

I read, with interest about the Seaside City Council voting to open beaches and hotels.

I am a resident of Astoria, so I realize I don't have a taxpaying opinion on this subject, but I am appalled that Seaside would even consider going against the rest of the county and state requirements and closures.

Having a ton of people converging on Seaside doesn't mean those people will stay in Seaside, and not go outside of the city limits, so decisions you make also affect the rest of the coastal communities.

I think this is a horribly irresponsible stance to take, and I strongly urge you to follow Gov. Kate Brown's lead, and not try to be economic cowboys. I truly believe this will backfire on you, as well as put many of us needlessly in danger.

TERRIE POWERS
Astoria