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OUR VIEW

Nebeker, Bangs for county commission

The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners has correctly identified the most important policy issues facing the North Coast — housing, a new jail, mental health, child care — but has often missed opportunities to lead.

Part of the problem is commissioners get distracted by infighting, procedural squabbles and other detours and let their focus drift.

You might not know it from the campaign flyers in your mailbox, but the county commission is nonpartisan. Commissioners set policy and supervise the county manager, who executes day-to-day operations and an \$84 million budget.

We don't fault political parties and interest groups for trying to influence elections — we are First Amendment purists — but we have a different hope for our local boards.

Ideally, in our view, the county commission should be more like a jury: open-minded, objective and drawn from a cross section of our community.

All four candidates for the May election — who interviewed remotely with The Astorian's editorial board via GoToMeeting because of the coronavirus pandemic — have the kind of backgrounds and qualities we prefer.

Our endorsements are based on who we believe has the potential to be more effective over the next four years, as well as the mix of voices necessary to shape better public policy.

District 2

We endorse Commissioner Sarah Nebeker in District 2, which covers Gearhart, Clatsop Plains and portions of Seaside and Warrenton.



Sarah Nebeker

First elected in 2012, Nebeker has carved out a place on the county commission over two terms as an advocate for the arts and social services.

The Arts Council of Clatsop County helped with a national study released in 2017 that put a dollar figure on the impact of the nonprofit arts and culture sector on the North Coast. Nebeker, who was married to the late painter, Royal Nebeker, said in a statement at the time that through the “evidence-based study, we can grow the arts, a clean industry, in Clatsop County.”

She is a consistent voice for improvements at Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, the county's mental health contractor.

“I have a track record of making improvements in our services, in public health, mental health,” she said of her pitch to voters. “I have advocated strongly with our state and national representatives for better education for our youth and for the arts, because that is an important part of our education and brain development.

“I have worked towards making a better environment for living-wage jobs.”

We commend Nebeker for trying to change the tone during her year as board chairwoman in 2019, but we disagreed with her insistence that bringing in a parliamentarian was necessary to enforce order. The move was a distraction that undermined longtime County Counsel Heather Reynolds.

We also wish Nebeker didn't wait until she was running for reelection to publicly stand behind her vote in 2017 to opt Clatsop County out of a \$1 billion lawsuit against the state over timber harvests. The 3-2 vote came under a harsh spotlight after other timber counties won last year in Linn County Circuit Court, but the state plans to appeal.

While the vote looks shaky in hindsight, many of the people who testified before the county commission at the time wanted the county to opt out in favor of more balanced forest management.

We are also perplexed Nebeker declined to take a position on cap

and trade. The issue should not pre-occupy the county commission — it will rightfully be decided by the state Legislature — but most counties took a side. Two Clatsop County commissioners — Mark Kujala and Lianne Thompson — wrote letters of opposition.

John Toyooka, a manager at Lum's Auto Center, is making his first run for elected office. The U.S. Marine Corps veteran has served on the foundation boards of Clatsop Community College and Providence Seaside Hospital.

His priorities would be improving the county's infrastructure and long-term planning.

Toyooka believes the county should have participated in the timber lawsuit and opposed cap and trade to protect industry on the North Coast.

His business experience would be an asset in county budget deliberations. We hope he continues to pursue public service.

District 4

We endorse Courtney Bangs in District 4, which covers eastern Astoria to Westport.

The Knappa preschool teacher and mother of three would bring a

new perspective to the county commission on issues like child care and the balance between work and family.

Her energy could help call attention to often-overlooked rural communities and improve engagement.

With no prior government experience, she would need to quickly learn the nuances of the county's budget given the expected financial fallout from the coronavirus.

“I just feel like new blood, new perspective, new experiences, might shake things up and get things done,” she said.

There are some red flags, though.



Courtney Bangs

When Bangs announced her campaign last year, she spoke mostly about cap and trade and the timber lawsuit and sounded like a protest sign at a #TimberUnity rally. While that may have been smart politics, given the makeup of the district, we think it would be a step backward if that is her mission.

The county commission can — and sometimes should — get involved in regional and statewide issues, but we would like commissioners to sharpen their focus locally.

Commissioner Kathleen Sullivan, who was chosen as board chairwoman in January, is campaigning for reelection after running unopposed in 2016.

She has shown a diligent, methodical approach to policy. Thrown into the unexpected role of presiding over the board during a pandemic, she has ably handled the responsibility.

Her interest in expanding broadband in rural communities has taken on urgency as the physical isolation over the virus illustrates disparities in access.

Sullivan and Thompson strayed too far in the clash with the former county manager over whether commissioners should have a greater say in day-to-day operations. While the debate exposed the county manager's leadership weaknesses, the issue faded after his retirement and now feels like wasted motion.

Like Nebeker, Sullivan waited until she was running for reelection to publicly stand behind her vote to opt out of the timber lawsuit.

We also think Sullivan should have a more robust answer on cap and trade — she said it is a state, not county, issue — given she knew Bangs and others would make it a campaign theme.

Overall, we see Sullivan as someone who got involved in public service for the right reasons and has thoughtful ideas to contribute. We trust, if she is not reelected, she will find a way to serve the North Coast.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stay safe

In light of the movement towards returning to “normal,” I find an uneasy sense of false security with the majority of the public failing to wear masks in public. I've called around to a few “essential” businesses who do not require their employees or customers to wear masks, and the prevailing response is, “We don't have to, it's not required by law.”

OK, well, newflash — the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not have legal authority to require anyone to do anything. The CDC and Oregon Health Authority strongly recommend that we follow all precautionary measures: social distancing, hand-washing, avoid touching your face, staying home if you're sick and wearing a mask.

These behaviors should be adhered to until our state has 14 days in a row of declining new cases. Considering there were 13 positive cases confirmed recently at an Astoria processing plant, we are far from this goal.

Please, stay safe and practice all CDC precautionary behaviors to keep your friends and loved ones safe. This is the time for us to come together as a community, don't engage in anti-science conspiracies and rebellious actions simply because there's no legal punishment. Use common sense and a mask, we're all in this together.

LAURA JACKSON
Astoria

Especially meaningful

I am writing to give a tip-of-the-hat to our community nurses and midwives. May 12 will mark the 200th birthday of Florence Nightingale, and is International Nurses Day. As I write this letter on May 5, it is the International Day of the Midwife. These two occasions are especially meaningful this year in the World Health Organization Year of the Nurse and Midwife.

I visited St. Thomas Hospital in London many years ago, and was awed by the museum of Florence Nightingale. She was a formidable Victorian woman who organized health and relief efforts during the Crimean War, despite incompetent and uncaring British military officers. She was the founder of modern nursing.

Our nurses have been brought to the forefront during the horrors of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our local nurse-midwives are providing exemplary care to women and babies. Never have we been so thankful for the dedication of these two professional groups. Nurses and midwives provide caring, healing and teaching on every shift in every role to help improve the health of the people they serve. They make a difference in our lives.

Please take a moment to thank these dedicated professionals, and join me in giving them the recognition they deserve.

BRENDA PENNER
Retired nurse and nurse-midwife
Astoria

Breakthrough

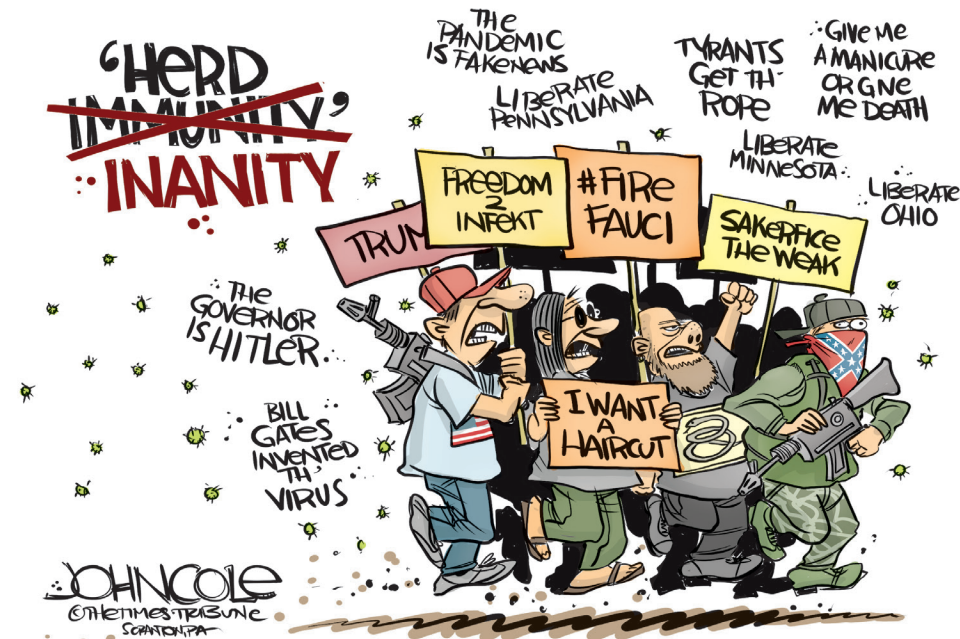
Recently I ran out of hand sanitizer, which I was using as a spread. However, using baby wipes works perfectly well, when dipped in salsa.

I tried to reach Fox News any number of times to let them in on my breakthrough. But, for whatever reason, they have not returned my calls.

DALE FLOWERS
Warrenton

Grateful

Blue Scorchers Bakery & Cafe recently received the \$10,000 grant from the Small Business Administration for COVID-19 relief. Thirty-one of us were at work before the shutdown.



All of us are grateful to our fellow taxpayers for funding the SBA, to the SBA staff hustling to administer the program and to our legislators for their leadership in this time.

Thanks in part to this support, we've been able to continue baking. We hope our sister businesses are also getting the support they need.

JOE GARRISON
Co-owner, Blue Scorchers Bakery & Cafe
Astoria

Good choice

We have an important election coming up. No, not the 2020 presidential election.

It's our local election in May for Clatsop County commissioner, which in some ways impacts our day-to-day lives even more than the federal elections. The liquefied natural gas issue was a classic example of the impact county commissioners play in determining our quality of life.

First elected after the LNG issue ended, Kathleen Sullivan is now running for a second term. Her yard signs say “In-

dependence, Integrity, Experience.” Having worked with her on a local county issue, I agree she exemplifies these qualities.

Kathleen's first term on the commission demonstrated her organizational, prioritizing and communication skills. Seems like all of the above are key qualities of a good commissioner. What do you think?

The fact Kathleen is running for a second term indicates she is committed to all the hours of reading, seeking out and listening to constituents' opinions and staff reports, and the individual research good commissioners do in order to cast knowledgeable, well thought-out votes on county issues.

Sometimes, on a nice day, I go up to the Astoria Column, look out over the lower Columbia area, and think how lucky I am to live here. So yes, when I vote, I want someone committed to protecting the beauty and environmental sustainability of this jewel I call home.

Kathleen considers representing east county a privilege. I believe her record warrants reelection, and I hope you will also consider her.

CARL DOMINEY
Astoria