

OPINION



the Astorian

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OUR VIEW

Post office binds our nation together

The post office is one of the marvels of America's economy and culture.

During times of war and peace, prosperity and decline, the post office binds the nation together. Of all the federal departments, none touch the broad mass of Americans so regularly and many times intimately as the U.S. Postal Service.

President Donald Trump's threat to withhold funds for the Postal Service in advance of the November election is predictable within his political pathology. But as a presidential governing strategy it is enormously wrongheaded and destructive.

While President Trump's intention is narrowly focused on the delivery of mail ballots, messing with the Postal Service's readiness will bring considerable collateral damage to millions of Americans in all regions and all stations in life.

At this point in the 2020 election, with Trump trailing in the polls, undermining the validity of the vote appears to be Trump's political strategy. But at what cost? The final ruination of the Republican brand?

What a pathetic power grab. We are lucky that Trump accidentally said the quiet part out loud regarding his motivation for removing mailboxes and hampering the effectiveness of the Postal Service as a whole.

What's worse is the way he is trying to create doubt about a well-functioning and much-used part of our daily machinery. This is why the nation is reacting like it is.

It is impossible to overstate the Postal Service's importance in vital



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Mail trucks in Astoria in January.

personal and commercial interactions. One of our region's many local postmasters provides a valuable look behind the mail boxes:

"Oysterville has the longest continuously running post office in Washington state," Postmaster Greg Rogers said. "The town itself only has a population of about 14 people on a good day but our post office and mail box is the Grand Central for everyone north of Nahcotta. And that's a lot of people, mostly retired. Medications, paychecks and small packages for those with Etsy or eBay sites help make up the critical difference for many up here trying to stay afloat."

Rogers particularly notes the importance of ordering prescriptions by mail, which spare vulnerable people trips to pharmacies. While we all obviously enjoy getting out and visiting the pharmacist, grocer and other vital community

assets, in the midst of a pandemic, the post office allows residents to avoid needless potential exposure to coronavirus.

As to the president's stated motivation for wanting to impede mail voting — that it is subject to tampering and fraud — nothing could be further from the truth.

Washington and Oregon pioneered mail-in ballots.

Contrary to outlandish lies, it is a system that works nearly without flaw. Some may argue that Washington should follow the Oregon system of requiring all ballots to be in the hands of election officials by Election Day — avoiding a drawn-out counting process. Others argue that Oregon should maximize the voting franchise by following Washington's practice of counting all votes cast or mailed up through election night.

Trump's deliberate sabotage of

mail delivery times may argue for Washington's system.

To suggest that mail-in voting will result in more fraud is ridiculous — and contrary to Oregon's much studied system of mail balloting.

County and state election officials are justly proud of their long and well-deserved reputation for running clean and competent elections. Overseen by elected Republicans and Democrats alike, balloting in the Pacific Northwest has been scandal-free — unlike the appalling catastrophes that could occur if citizens are required to line up at polling places this November.

Regardless of whether Trump succeeds in slowing mail deliveries to a crawl, there are things each of us can do to ensure our vote is counted.

As noted by Washington's Republican Secretary of State Kim Wyman, the Postal Service recommends that voters mail completed ballots a week before Election Day. Polling finds few undecided voters this year, so there is no excuse for procrastination in returning ballots. Voters are also encouraged to use official drop boxes, which are open 24/7 during the voting period and close at 8 p.m. on Nov. 3. These drop-off sites are conveniently located throughout Oregon and Washington, and facilitate safe voting.

The Postal Service has served us well since Ben Franklin was appointed our first postmaster general in 1775. We must honor this most popular founding father by fighting any effort to wreck the institution he created.

GUEST COLUMN

Touching our community's hearts with music

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the North Coast Chorale.

While I'm sure singers are singing to themselves at home from time to time, the coronavirus pandemic has brought this community's sharing of artistic expression to a sudden halt.

Beginning in January, the chorale was planning a yearlong celebration of our

30th anniversary. The year was to include two performances of Morten Lauridsen's "Lux Aeterna" in March with the River City Singers of St. Helens.

Concerts in May were to have featured favorite songs selected by chorale singers from previous programs. The chorale had also planned our seasonal Handel's "Messiah" sing-and-play along benefiting the regional food bank and two concerts of holiday music.

All performers create something from nothing. Since music exists in time, then it is only music when it moves in time. Something vibrates and awakens the spiritual inside of the listener. It is a complex process that we all may have forgotten without live music over the last six months.

To put this sudden silence into perspective, here are some facts from 29 years of music making:

- Sixteen performances of Handel's "Messiah"; 14 with community instrumentalists as a benefit for local food banks raising over \$15,000

- Presenting at least 116 concerts requiring over 2,320 hours of rehearsal focusing on a wide diversity of subjects and themes

- Many concerts were accompanied by guest artists who were compensated by the chorale to the tune of approximately \$20,000

- Concerts by the Portland Gay Men's Chorus, Vancouver Orpheus Male Choir and two female choral groups from Portland Community College, with some as benefits for the Clatsop Community College Performing Arts Center

A memorable concert of Handel's "Messiah" at the Liberty Theatre fell on a night when snow and ice blanketed most



Denise Reed leads the North Coast Chorale in a concert.

of Astoria. All of the singers showed up. After the concert, Astorian Don Morden shared with me that his wife, Anne, put the chains on their car tires so they could drive on the hills.

The tenor soloist was unable to make the concert so yours truly sang the beginning recitative and aria. The audience was composed of maybe 30 people.

We performed Mendelssohn's "Elijah" the next time we were at the Liberty in 2008. There were over 60 singers and 28 instrumentalists. The auditorium was filled with over 400 attendees. Astoria's favorite Deac Guidi played Elijah.

During our 20th anniversary in 2010, we presented a program of favorite music from the seven directors of the chorale.

Some of the notable music the chorale has sung over the years: performances

with the Clatsop County Children's Chorus of Rutter's "Mass of the Children"; the Bach and Rutter "Magnificat"; Britten's "A Ceremony of Carols"; a bicentennial concert of folk music from the various nationalities that settled in Astoria; "The Voyage," a commissioned work by local composer Barbara Poulshock; "The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace," by Karl Jenkins; "Songs of the Earth" music based on Native American poetry and prayers; a concert of spirituals and gospel, jazz, folk and holiday music of many cultures and customs; and many more individual selections of great choral music in many languages. We also presented two staged productions of Menotti's opera "Amahl and the Night Visitors" and the musical, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat."

The chorale has also performed with local ensembles like the Astoria Music Festival, Cascadia Chamber Opera and the North Coast Symphonic Band, sang at care and retirement centers and displayed art by local artists and college students at performances.

Throughout our 29 years we have had one singular goal: to touch the hearts of our audience with our music.

We urge you to be patient and wait for us to serenade you again with more music. Consider this an intermission. Our group may not look the same, but our desire to uplift you with our singing will be the same.

We truly appreciate your undying support for the past 29 years.

Denise Reed is the conductor of the North Coast Chorale.