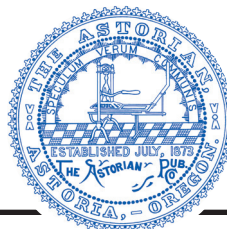


# OPINION

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# the Astorian

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## GUEST COLUMN

# Some good news for Oregonians

**G**ood news for Oregonians! Well, for some Oregonians. Six weeks ago, Oregon's legislative leaders announced their audacious idea: Give \$500 to any Oregonian marooned in the abyss of state unemployment benefits.

Here is the backstory of the daring program that launched Wednesday morning — and which credit unions announced ahead of legislators — and tapped out on Friday morning.

Last month, the well-documented backlog at the Oregon Employment Department was moving so slowly that state Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, and House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, devised a temporary workaround. Go outside the normal unemployment process and give money directly to jobless Oregonians.

On July 9, they announced their plan in a press release. "I knew that if we issued a press release," Courtney told me Wednesday, "we were boxed in. We had to produce."

Anna Braun, Courtney's chief of staff, had suggested such payments months ago. Separately, Kotek and her staff also were mulling such a concept.

Courtney wanted one-time checks as large as \$1,500. Kotek favored \$500, so as to spread the money among more Oregonians. They agreed on \$500, estimating that 70,000 Oregonians could be served through \$35 million in federal coronavirus relief funds.

The financial industry leaped aboard, ready to help. The state Department of Administrative Services promised its commitment but said launching the program would take at least six weeks, whereas Kotek wanted action in a matter of days.

On July 14, Kotek and Courtney took their concept to the Legislative Emergency Board, which has an uneasy relationship with some lawmakers and Gov. Kate Brown.

In the eyes of many, the E-Board has been acting like a mini-Legislature in its response to the coronavirus pandemic. Courtney said the governor thinks the board has encroached on her powers. Some legislators, especially Republicans, contend the E-Board makes too many decisions that rightly should have been left to the full Legislature and which could have been handled during the two special sessions this summer.



People wait for their checks outside a credit union in Klamath Falls.

Klamath Falls Herald and News

Nevertheless, the \$500 proposal won unanimous, bipartisan support from E-Board members after less than 25 minutes of discussion.

"Even though \$500 will not solve all problems, our ability to move some of these dollars quickly out to individuals who need the help, I think, is of paramount importance," Kotek told her colleagues. "However many meetings it takes in the next five days to implement this, we will need to do."

## THE \$35 MILLION AVAILABLE WAS GONE IN JUST THREE DAYS, ACCORDING TO THE OREGON CAPITAL BUREAU.

Implementation took far longer. The initial details were vague, needing to be worked out. Kotek and Courtney wanted a program that was statewide, effective and efficient, so people applying for the \$500 wouldn't get the runaround.

"People are out there dying," Courtney said in July, "and I don't like to blame the Employment Department. I just like to do something. So we're trying to do something."

Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, applauded

the proposal during the E-Board discussion but criticized the Legislature for failing to properly oversee the Employment Department.

He acknowledged that the department staff is working hard but said, "They've hired 700 people in the last four months and they're still not doing their job. There is a system problem and a system failure that I believe we need to take action on."

Like many lawmakers, Rep. Rob Nosse, D-Portland, had a list of roughly

said, referring to the Employment Department. "These people have lost hope and they are absolutely frantic and desperate. If we say that we have a finite amount of money and it's first come, first serve, I don't know what that's going to look like in the lobby of banks."

To help prevent fraud in distributing the \$500, Oregonians had to apply in person at one of the more than 150 participating credit union or bank branches around the state.

The in-person approval process was quick; the wait was not. Some locations were first come, first serve. Others required appointments.

The \$35 million available was gone in just three days, according to the Oregon Capital Bureau.

Financial institutions will have a final funding allotment cap. Previously scheduled appointments will continue through the end of the month.

Courtney said lawmakers knew from the start that the money wouldn't be enough to cover all needs, the Oregon Capital Bureau reported, but it was a start.

"We had to take action to get money directly to people as quickly as possible," he said.

*Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### MAKA

Former presidential candidate Marianne Williamson provoked jeers and taunts from hatemongers as she articulated her spiritual manifesto — urging Americans to turn politics from hate into an instrument of love. Makes me wonder why so many Americans find loving one another so inconvenient.

President Donald Trump's director of Citizenship and Immigration Services, Ken Cuccinelli, proposed a revision of Emma Lazarus' famous poem inscribed on the Statue of Liberty. Cuccinelli believes that the tired and poor should be immigrants "who can stand on their own two feet and who will not become a public charge." How calloused.

There's a whole lot of hating going on, and I'm not convinced we can just let it die of its own weight. We need to confront bad, hateful ideas with good, nurturing ideas, allowing the public to see extremists for what they are.

I counter offensive, tasteless, prevaricating bigots by wearing my "Make America Kind Again" cap every day. Would that others would follow suit.

And I tune in to kind, thoughtful people who make me laugh, since I can't stay mad at someone who makes me laugh. It's that simple.

ROBERT BRAKE  
Ocean Park, Washington

### Regaling

Over the years, I have been a regular at our post office, as well as others around the state and country. What a gift they are. I have always felt certain that any package, letter or card that I mail out, no matter where in the U.S., will arrive at its designated destination in an expedient manner.

Here in the Astoria location, it is always impressive how our mail clerks handle each person with courtesy and patience. Even when I am uncertain what I should

be doing, they always treat me with respect and kindness. And, our carriers are always cheerful and pleasant.

How could we possibly get along without the U.S. Postal Service? I know that other services exist, but I always think of the post office as my first option. They are fairly priced, prompt and efficient.

Oregon has done mail-in ballots for over 20 years, and I would never want to go back to standing in a polling line. Mail-in gives me time to read through the pamphlet that describes the candidates and issues, make informed decisions, vote at my leisure and get my ballot in the mail when it is convenient for me.

Please join me in supporting the U.S. Postal Service and their dedicated employees. We should be regaling our postal service workers for all that they do, and showing gratitude for the fact that we have such an efficient postal system.

MARTHA PINE  
Astoria

### Pretty clear

President Donald Trump has announced that if reelected, he will permanently eliminate payroll taxes. Payroll taxes fund Social Security, a 12.4% split between employer and employee, and Medicare, a 2.9% split between employer and employee.

Trump's and Joe Biden's positions are pretty clear.

Trump's declaration is to end the direct funding of Social Security and Medicare. That means taking away 35.9% of all federal revenues. He suggests that growth in the economy will make up for it, and it will be paid out of general revenues.

Our national debt is in excess of \$20 trillion. Interest on the national debt must be paid. The military and its operations must be paid. All the federal government agencies' employee salaries, benefits and retirements must be paid. Federal government agencies' operations and activities must be paid.



DARYL CAGLE.com

What happens when interest rates go from near zero upward? The overwhelming majority of recipients depend on this retirement income.

Biden's plan will continue the payroll tax system, and raise the Social Security cap to \$400,000.

It's pretty clear to figure out.

MARK PRESCOTT  
Gearhart

### Homage to glueboard

Lying upon the courthouse grounds in Astoria, a Douglas fir log memorializes the sea of wood our region once held. We don't harvest logs like that anymore, and we are unable to create such trees.

This log has more impact when we consider the state of our forests since we began taking more than could be replaced. Evidence of overcutting rides on virtually every log truck rushing by. In a clearcut, too many trees are bycatch, and marketed as

fiber. All excess shall be heaped onto a pile and burned at a later time. Don't fret however; we have more trees than ever.

But memories fade, and to console ourselves, history can be revised each day. The Old One at the courthouse came to mind last week as I followed Caitlin Seyfried on the Gnat Creek Trail, featured in the Aug. 20 issue of Coast Weekend. She writes of a trail that "meanders through the forest, featuring impressively large old stumps now acting as nursery logs for new trees."

The picture of that trail winding its way through the dog hair is worth a thousand words. Those old stumps stand as witness to a bygone era, and the lost potential of our forest resource. One of those old trees held more goodness than 50 of today's crop trees.

Better to walk up to an old stump, lay your hand upon it, say a little prayer, for when all the silent tombstones marking the original forest vanish, they are gone forever.

GARY DURHEIM  
Seaside