

OPINION



the Astorian

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Fanning the flames

On Dec. 17, The Astorian ran an editorial that invites readers “to come with us on a virtual road trip” which purports to illustrate that the tragic fires that damaged towns throughout Oregon in 2020 could have been prevented by extensive backcountry logging in remote areas of national forests.



GEORGE
SEXTON

While I appreciate the invitation, I don’t need to take a “virtual road trip” to know firsthand about the impacts of the 2020 fire season on my neighbors and community. This past summer my family took a very real emergency road trip out of Talent while fleeing the Almeda fire as it ripped through the Rogue Valley.

The Almeda fire was started by a human-caused ignition near an urban BMX bike park on the Bear Creek Greenway in Ashland on a red flag day with extreme winds. The fire blew through the greenway blasting dense blackberry patches and streamside cottonwood stands while embers jumped from house to house and structure to structure as homes and businesses were consumed, neighbors fled and thousands of lives were upended.

The Almeda fire had nothing whatsoever to do with public lands forest management. It bears repeating: the Almeda fire did not burn a single acre of U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management forestlands. It was an urban fire along I-5, in a highly manipulated environment, that was started at the wrong place with the flames being fanned by an extreme wind event.

Yet The Astorian salaciously points to the devastation of the town where I live, Talent, to promote its political agenda of backcountry logging on national forests.

The Astorian and sister papers like the Capital Press are welcome to advocate for federal policies that increase logging and decrease protections for



Associated Press

A man examines homes destroyed by the Almeda fire in Talent in September.

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wildlife and watersheds, but exploiting the very real tragedy and suffering here in the Rogue Valley — that had nothing at all to do with federal land management — to promote backcountry logging is mean-spirited and wrong.

So, what about federal forest management and forest fire? The Astorian’s “virtual tour” also makes passing mention of the impacts of the Beachie Creek fire on the communities of Detroit and Gates and the Holliday fire on the towns of Blue River and Vida. The Beachie Creek fire burned thousands of acres on

Willamette National Forest.

When I was young, the Willamette National Forest had an unofficial motto of “a billion or bust” referring to the astounding rate of logging in the 1970s and 80s when that single national forest attempted to supply private timber companies with up to a billion board feet of public trees per year.

That patchwork quilt legacy of hundreds of thousands of acres of clearcuts and dense timber plantations is still with us to this day. While the timber industry may resent the shift from clearcut-

ting to forest thinning on the contention that there has ever been any “lack of forest management” on the Willamette National Forest rings false.

Similarly, the facts about the Holliday Farm fire that impacted the communities of Blue River and Vida just don’t support the simplistic “log it all” conclusions touted by The Astorian.

Over 75% of the forestlands impacted by the Holliday Farm fire consisted of previously clearcut private industrial timberlands in which trees are managed as a plantation cash crop.

There are few more heavily logged landscapes in Oregon — or the world for that matter.

Extensive logging didn’t stop the Holliday Farm Fire — indeed, the ubiquitous tree plantations may have contributed to the fire severity.

As an Oregonian directly impacted by the 2020 fire season, unlike The Astorian, I am not looking to cast blame, exploit tragedy or score political points. But I would like to set the record straight. There is a way out of this mess, and it requires more than finger-pointing.

If we really want to come together to protect communities, lives and forests there are three steps that must be taken: First we need to have fire-safe communities in which work is done to “harden” homes and structures in the face of fire; secondly we need to stop logging fire-resistant old growth trees and creating additional timber plantations; and lastly it is way past time to seriously address climate change that is extending and exacerbating fire season.

The Almeda fire is a painful reminder that should the fire season keep lengthening and temperatures keep soaring, when strong winds blow fire toward our communities no amount of backcountry logging is going to make a real difference.

George Sexton serves as the conservation director for the Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Corrupt

The Trump presidency will be infamous for being the most corrupt and lethal administration in American history. Most knowledgeable scientists agree the devastation wrought by COVID-19 was avoidable, and occurred due to a lack of federal leadership.

Not just a lack of leadership, but a malicious campaign of misinformation that encouraged people to act in direct opposition to what the experts recommended. This horrific, inexplicable behavior has been seen in most of the Republican Party at large, which reflects a much greater pandemic of self-destructive, nihilistic cultism which refutes facts and reality, while eagerly consuming hateful, false and incendiary rhetoric to stave off their fears and feelings of powerlessness.

Tabloid news agencies like Fox know this is wrong, but won’t give up the revenues harvested from the millions of wild-eyed viewers at home chanting “lock ‘em up.”

Retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, who was just pardoned for lying to the FBI, encouraged President Donald Trump to declare martial law and have another election. This is a blatant attempt of a treasonous coup d’état, even after Trump’s own attorney general said there was no evidence of widespread fraud.

This country is being assailed by multiple sources who seek to maintain power through lies and conspiracy theories to promote hatred and violence toward anyone who disagrees with their delusional fantasies. Vladimir Putin couldn’t be happier.

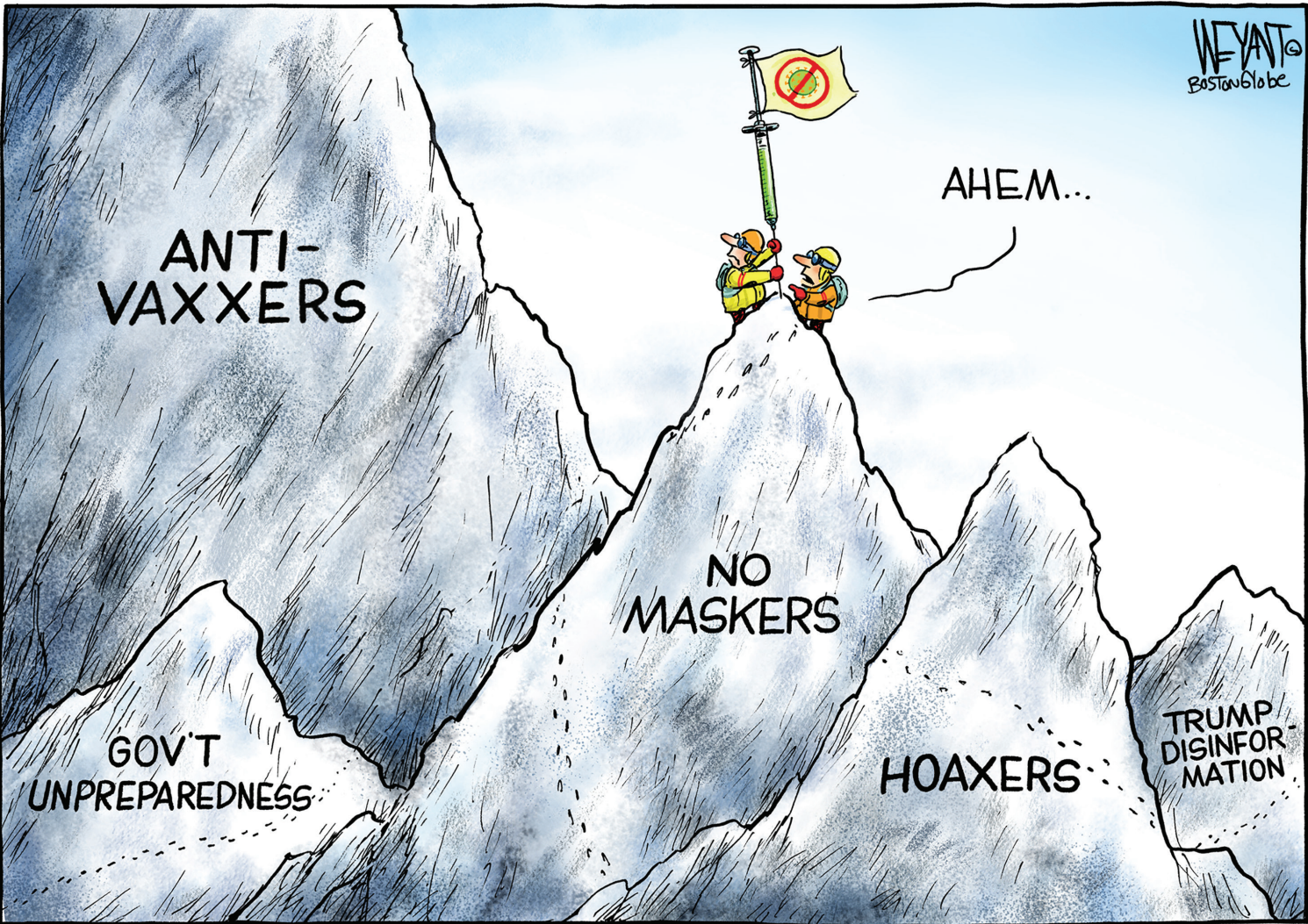
BRENTON KAHLE
Astoria

Totally shocked

As a visitor to the state of Oregon, and an advocate for both human and animal rights, I am totally shocked that mink farms have remained open during the crisis of COVID-19. Many other statewide businesses have been adversely affected by this pandemic, but a mink farm is certainly nonessential.

I keep up with current affairs of the pandemic, having worked as an intensive care unit registered nurse for 45 years. I take it very seriously.

Culling of mink has already been done in several European countries. Why has Gov. Kate Brown allowed mink farms to



LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer’s name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response

to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.

remain open? And why did she try to hide it from us?

MARJORIE ACKERMAN
Flagstaff, Arizona

The arts live on

I would like to take the time, on behalf of the Columbia River Symphony nonprofit organization, to thank all of the

participants, including those behind the scenes and the surrounding communities, for supporting the musical arts for our latest Holiday Winter Community Concert.

Musicians and nonmusicians from all parts of the world — including a U.S. Coast Guard musician serving in the Middle East in Afghanistan at the time of his recording — worked together, remotely and with COVID-19 safety protocols and social-distancing practices in place, to put

forth this memorable community concert for all.

The symphony would also like to give a big thank you to Jennifer Crockett, executive director of the Liberty Theatre, for all of her support and work to assist in pushing this project forward. Another big thank you goes out to Justin Grafton and Emily Engdahl for their dedication and encouragement with editing this entire concert.

The importance of supporting the arts, local and afar, are more important now than ever before. For whatever medium an artist may choose to utilize to express themselves, know most importantly that it allows us all to look inwards and laugh, cry and feel all of the emotions that define us as individual human beings.

Please continue to support this community effort by following us and sharing this concert on columbiariversymphony.org, and consider making a donation to our 501 (c)(3) nonprofit.

The arts live on. Columbia River Symphony — It’s What Feelings Sound Like.

CORY PEDERSON
Astoria