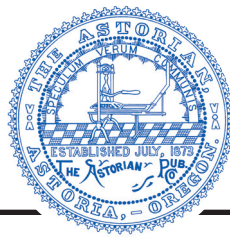


OPINION



the Astorian

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OUR VIEW

Pandemic offers opportunity for change

When the coronavirus pandemic hit, there was no coordinated federal approach on how to handle myriad elements of the crisis. It was left to governors, in conjunction with state legislatures, to determine what to shut down and when.

Of course, many people bristled against state government-imposed restrictions and shutdowns. These actions — ignoring and outright resisting simple safety announcements — went dangerously far beyond rejecting them just because Gov. Kate Brown and Gov. Jay Inslee are Democrats.

Some people are still openly flouting the simple idea of wearing a mask that properly covers the face in public; others have attended weddings, religious gatherings and large family events whose numbers have been way higher than health experts allow.

The consequences have been fatal. The total number of deaths in one day hit a record high two weeks after Thanksgiving, a statistic that was grimly accurate in its predictability, and sadly likely to be repeated because of unwise Christmas travel.

There can hardly be anyone who would question that absurd and widespread unwillingness to be a team player in our states' survival hurt us, and very likely has prolonged the suffering.

Beyond that, those pressuring for a quick return to "normalcy" include many who may be too rigidly invested in ways of the past.

We are optimistic about the resilience of the North Coast's residents. Over the past five decades, our lives have changed significantly for other reasons. Fishing and logging declined, and only operators who were the smartest — or luckiest — survived and are still in those businesses.

Tourism has always been a staple because of our lovely sandy beaches in Seaside and Long Beach, Washington; Cannon Beach has carved out a niche promoting



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Some restaurants have emphasized outdoor seating while adapting to government restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic.

the visual arts and that has spread to Astoria. And tourism based on our storied history and our maritime heritage blossomed with huge financial investments following the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial amid the realization that we had something pretty remarkable right here.

So we have a track record of rolling with the punches. When the canneries closed, we adapted. When the spotted owl and related controversies restricted logging and reduced log exports, we coped and came out in good shape. Recessions have come and gone. We are still here.

And so it will be with the virus. We must cope, then adapt.

2021 will signal the beginning of that process, but assuredly not the end. Vaccines have been developed and hopefully will become widely available. Once that happens, we might be able to get back to our lives without fear.

The new normalcy will likely be different from the world we left — or put on hold — in March.

At the very least, the pandemic has caused two major paradigm shifts in thinking about the modern workplace.

The first is the nature of "place" itself, although perhaps that is not a significant change for the greater Astoria area. Since the inter-

net age dawned, The Astorian has chronicled the way the waterfront scenery of our region has been an attractive destination for professionals whose singular skills, combined with robust Wi-Fi connections, mean they can live anywhere. This concept has been "discovered" around the world.

In a similar vein, during the pandemic we have realized that for many people whose work is largely done at a computer or phone, the "workplace" can be their kitchen table. They do not need to travel and be physically present in an office environment. Call centers discovered this years ago, and thousands of people all over the world already clock in remotely from their homes thanks to dedicated phone lines installed to run parallel to their personal phones. This has been extended during the pandemic in unexpected ways.

Of course, there are drawbacks. When people work from home it means professional isolation with potentially much less personal contact with colleagues. This results in an inability to share ideas in person in an atmosphere that stimulates creativity and productivity.

And employees "missing" from the physical workplace have another impact. All managers lament that so many people work-

ing from home means fewer front-line people actually at the office to greet and serve people who arrive at workplaces expecting to meet a live human and receive in-person customer service.

Beyond that, though, has been the additional realization that this country is surviving on the backs of its generally unappreciated service workers, who are some of the lowest paid in today's economy.

It is almost impossible to list them all without leaving someone out.

Health workers are up on a pedestal right now — as they should be. Those who dedicate their lives to the caring arts must have significant science education plus the people skills to treat patients with kindness as individuals. It is certainly a common viewpoint that doctors are well rewarded. But nurses and certified nursing assistants play an even more significant role with much more patient contact and receive significantly lower paychecks.

Who else has saved our communities during this pandemic? Grocery store checkers and store stockers, delivery people, long-distance truck drivers and others have all proved their worth. And farmers, crop pickers, packers and shippers have worked unabated to keep us fed.

Before we give in to that perfectly natural desire to "get back to normal," we might want to take a long, hard look at exactly what "old normal" was — or, more properly, what "a new normal" could look like.

Most businesses operate with a balancing act between customer service and operational efficiency.

And most people in the service industry, and all except those at the top of the health field, are not adequately rewarded.

In the rush to "get back to normal," perhaps we would be wise to embrace that age-old concept that a crisis also signals an opportunity. An opportunity to introduce some positive change is here.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Applaud

I applaud my friend and fellow photographer Roger Dorband's letter to the editor of Dec. 31, the final day of this disturbing year.

He was referring to an editorial in this paper from Dec. 17 titled "Prioritize forest management," without mentioning climate change as the driving force behind our increasingly damaging and deadly forest wildfires.

And, I agree with his assertion that The Astorian's editorials are fueled by little more than the need to please their big-play local corporate interests, right on down the line to city and county government officialdom. No rocking those boats, heaven forbid.

Meanwhile, the Earth's going to hell in a handbasket. Wake up and do some damn good.

REX VERLEY
Astoria

Logjams

For this reader, the term "industrial logging" is, on its face, a source of amusement. As if there were any alternative harvest practice, say hobby loggin' or sports loggin' for instance.

Had any such low-impact harvest ever existed, it wasn't as profitable, and has long since gone extinct. Everything comes down to cost, and it all depends on who pays. The winning business plan is, and has always been, to privatize the assets and socialize the liabilities. Yes, reverse socialism.

And so there just isn't that much new about the downstream effect of massive harvests in municipal watersheds. The only notable change has been the timeline, the

locale and the level of turbidity.

Speaking of turbidity, history will show that municipalities at risk can't rely on forest practices reform to protect their water source. The Oregon Forest Practices Act of 1971 arrived on the heels of watershed destruction during the last go-round. By coincidence, 40 years after reforestation,

in 2020, the next plantation was ready for harvest. Rinse and repeat.

Townships by now ought to be able to seize their watershed by right of eminent domain. But that won't happen without legislative sanction, and such radical reform will never come without campaign finance reform.

Follow the money, but look no further than the Oregon Forest & Industries Council — or its captive, #TimberUnity — influence in our most recent general election. Without campaign finance reform, don't expect radical forest practices reform.

GARY DURHEIM
Seaside

STAR TRIBUNE
S&K

CERTIFIED



CERTIFIABLE

FRAUD! DEAD VOTERS!
FIND ME
11,780
VOTES!

