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WRITER’S NOTEBOOK

A surprising first impression on Bentz

‘T he difference between the Senate and the House,” Lyndon Johnson famously said, “is the difference between chicken salad and chicken shit.”

There are a few sobering realities about being a freshman in the U.S. House. For all of the esteem of being a member of Congress, Westerners especially reside too much on a commercial jet. When I covered those men and women as a Washington, D.C., correspondent, I often wondered which time zone their body clock was in. In that often weekly commute, they take a beating.



STEVE FORRESTER

The second reality is that being a freshman means you’ve only been given access to a coffee klatsch or cocktail party with 435 others. Once inside, the challenge is to move through that population and make deals and alliances. To get ahead in the House demands shoe leather and relentless energy.

And that gets to my initial skepticism about Cliff Bentz’s decision to succeed Greg Walden, who represented Oregon’s vast 2nd Congressional District for 22 years. Walden was a freshman at the age of 42. Bentz is 69, which gives him relatively little time to gain seniority. Oregon’s most consequential freshman congressman, Ron Wyden, became a House freshman at the age of 32, half Bentz’s age. In his first term, Wyden tore up the track.

If you talk to people who watched Bentz in the Oregon Legislature, you gain the impression that he runs very deep. Thoughtful and smart are the adjectives you hear about the man.

The leap from a statehouse to Congress is profound. Congressman Les AuCoin, who represented Astoria in the House for 18 years, told me: “Congress is not a bigger version of a state legislature.” Going from the state capitol to the national capitol “is like moving from chess to three-dimensional chess.”

Given that first impressions are



Jose Luis Magana/AP Photo

Supporters of President Donald Trump stormed the U.S. Capitol.

AFTER THE VIOLENT INCURSION OF THE CAPITOL, MANY REPUBLICANS WISED UP AND REALIZED THAT ABETTING THE PRESIDENT’S FICTION HAD BECOME A DANGEROUS CHOICE.

everything in politics, it was surprising to see the newly minted Congressman Bentz join the House Republicans who tried to keep alive President Donald Trump’s illusion about widespread voter fraud in the November election.

Bentz has said he cast that vote — to object to the electors from Pennsylvania — because many of his constituents had those kinds of sentiments about the presidential election. Fair enough. But every member of the House had an appointment with history on Jan. 6.

After the violent incursion of the Capitol, many Republicans wised up and realized that abetting the president’s fiction had become a dangerous choice.

Bentz also voted Wednesday against impeaching Trump for inciting the insurrection.

In this era, the velocity of change in national politics, and especially in Congress, is especially rapid. Suddenly the senators who fomented the drive to abet Trump’s lost cause — Josh Hawley, of Missouri, and Ted Cruz, of Texas — are

not hot commodities. They are outcasts.

Oregon’s Richard Neuberger had a rocky beginning as a freshman senator in 1954. But he quickly recovered and turned in a consequential term before his death in 1960. That was in a much different era, but it makes a certain point. In politics, it’s all about what you will do tomorrow.

It will be interesting to see how Bentz navigates the Class V rapids in front of him.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of The Astorian, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group. He was a Washington, D.C., correspondent for Pacific Northwest newspapers from 1978 to 1987. His chapter on the late U.S. Sen. Richard Neuberger will be in the upcoming book “Eminent Oregonians.”

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Time in seats

To parents, students and teachers struggling with online learning, please know that before COVID-19, dropout rates for online learning ranged between 30% and 80%.

To parents of special needs students, know your rights: You have a contract with your school district. Penalties for failure to meet those obligations include private school placement.

Teachers, know that there are things that you can do to improve the learning experience: Give students physical textbooks; reduce objectives; provide students with time to work off camera; release students during the time reserved for physical education, recess, lunch, art and music; and let them meet in small groups (video, chat) exclusive of you.

Also, reserve time to meet with students one-on-one during the time provided for physical education, recess, lunch, art and music; limit computer screen time to three hours; and use “flipped learning” principles. Determine what content you must present to the class, and what students can discover and learn on their own.

I understand the need to keep students on their computers: The fear of losing state funding. It’s about Carnegie units, e.g. time in seats.

It should be noted that the Carnegie Foundation is “exploring whether the unit, with its current focus on the amount of time students spend in classes ... should be replaced with a different metric, or set of metrics.”

In 1993, Carnegie President Ernest Boyer called the Carnegie unit “obsolete,” and said the time had come to bury it, once and for all. Seat time does not guarantee learning.

RICHARD DILLON
Warrenton

Could not be prouder

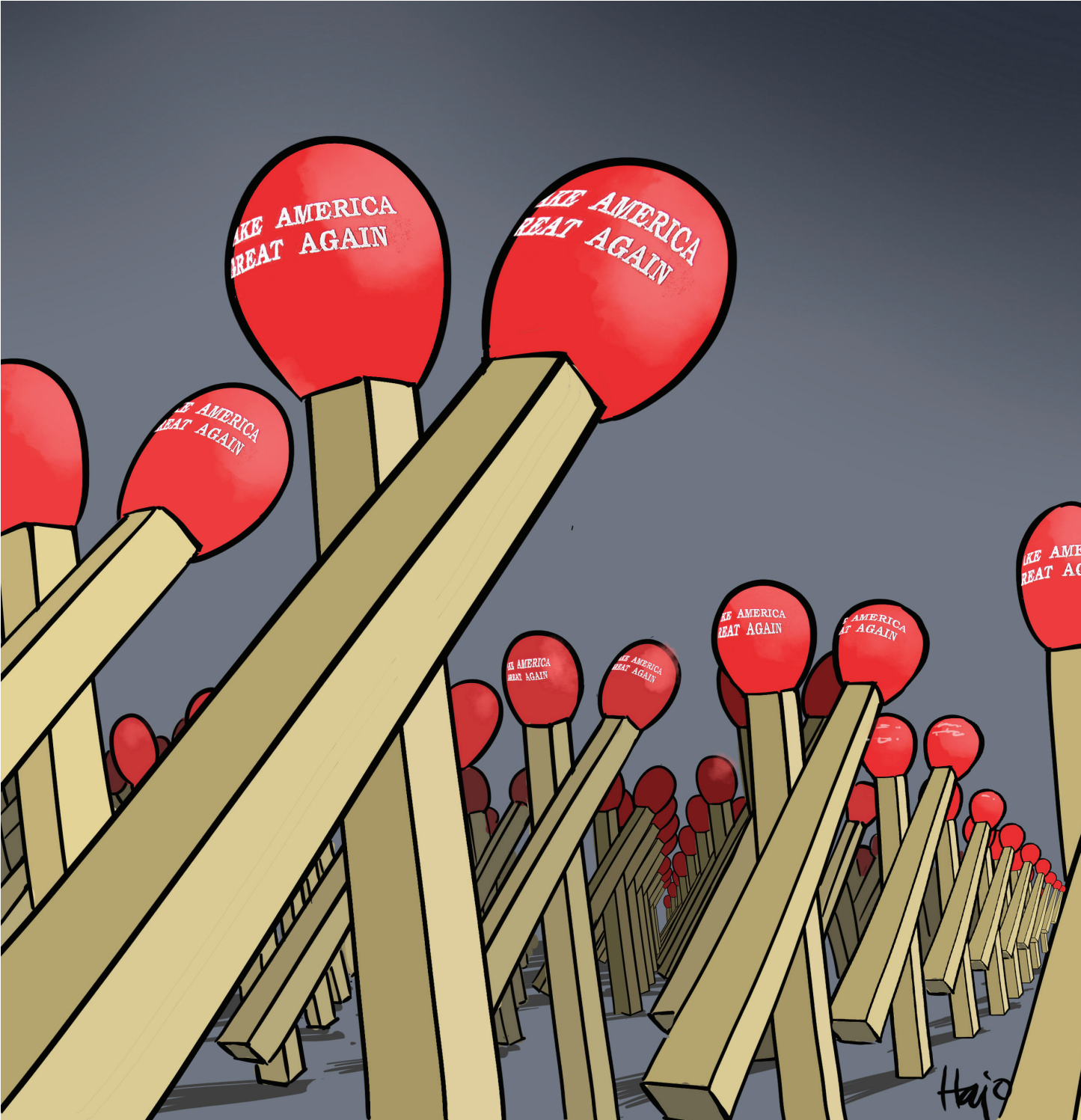
I want to give a public congratulations to one of Astoria’s own.

Jordan Poyer has become a National Football League star. Now playing a multipositional defensive back for the Buffalo Bills, he continues to make me proud as a Marine in dress blues.

His character in whole has allowed his teammates to name him a captain of that defense. He is also one of the keys that has the Bills a winning football team again.

Thank you, Jordan, for showing all of us that greatness can even come out of Astoria.

TROY HASKELL
Astoria



LETTERS WELCOME

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