

OPINION

theAstorian

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GUEST COLUMN

An independent twist

A third political party has joined the Oregon Legislature. State Sen. Brian Boquist, of Dallas, switched from Republican to being a registered voter with the Independent Party of Oregon.



DICK HUGHES

The 90 members of the Legislature now line up as 55 Democrats, 34 Republicans and one Independent.

This won't change the outcome of most legislation. Boquist remains committed to Republican values, including fiscal conservatism and

small government. But he says other legislators have talked with him about making a similar switch in parties in an effort to find common ground instead of being mired in continuing divisiveness and partisanship.

There long have been centrist legislators who worked outside their party caucuses to look for common agreement instead of advancing partisan agendas. As I've reported, Rep. Marty Wilde, D-Eugene, and others redoubled those efforts in the fall.

Boquist defies pigeonholing. He's described himself as a constitutional Republican. He's worked across party lines on a range of issues, including transportation. Throughout his political, military and business careers, he's shown no qualms about speaking his mind.

He regularly introduces constituents' bills he knows he'll vote against, believing the ideas deserve airing even if he doesn't agree. To tweak gun-control Democrats, in 2013 he presented a bill to require background checks for knife sales.

He gained national notoriety in 2019 when he warned Oregon State Police against forcing his return to the Capitol when Republican senators walked out. A big deal was made at the time but it petered out.

Speaking of unity: Boquist's Senate District 12 comprises the House districts represented by Republicans Ron Noble, of McMinnville, and Mike Nearman, of



Associated Press

State Sen. Brian Boquist has joined the Independent Party of Oregon.

Independence.

Rep. Teresa Alonso León, D-Woodburn, opened the first House session last week by leading the Pledge of Allegiance. Noble then gave a thoughtful five-minute address on collaboration and unity:

"Oregonians embrace the idea that differing opinions and ideas should have equal voice. Although we still have a long way to go to ensure that all voices truly are equal, that still remains our goal. That includes different views on how and why the government, any government, should be involved in our lives. How much individual autonomy and freedom do we sacrifice in the interest of the collective good. And how much do we restrict the good actors in order to restrain the bad actors."

Noble called on his House colleagues to overcome the politics of division.

"I join others in a call for unity and

healing," he said. "We have an opportunity to lead by example."

As for Rep. Nearman, the House Conduct Committee notified lawmakers and others that he would be in the building on Thursday. He is being investigated in regard to protesters entering the closed Capitol during the Dec. 21 special session.

The notice stated: "This email is to provide buildingwide notice that Representative Mike Nearman will be entering the Capitol on Thursday January 21st. You are receiving this notice as part of an ongoing LBPR 27 interim safety measure. Retaliation toward any person participating in an ongoing investigation is prohibited."

Questions legislators should ask:

In a recent guest column, I talked about how to evaluate legislators' effectiveness.

Retired lobbyist Dave Fiskum, who

was well-respected in his time around the Capitol, responded with four questions that he believes legislators should continually ask as they consider bills:

1. What is the problem for which a proposed policy or action is deemed to be the solution?
2. Is there an appropriate role for government to play?
3. If there is, what does the state expect to get for the money it is spending — in other words, what is the expected return on investment?
4. How will state government action affect the private sector, especially individual and corporate taxpayers on whom the state depends for money to fund its operations?

"In my experience," Fiskum wrote, "these questions are seldom asked or answered."

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kudos

I would like to extend kudos to the merchants of Astoria and Warrenton, where I do my shopping. They have shown dignity, grace and creativity during the past year.

Mandated measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic have often been difficult to understand and implement, and as the pandemic has waxed and waned, state and county requirements have all too frequently changed. As a business owner, I know that uncertainty is anathema.

Yet everywhere I shop, I encounter owners who are diligent in complying with COVID-19 requirements, employees who are beyond courteous and products that are as unique and high quality as ever. Every one of our local merchants is working long hours (even longer than before), experimenting with new products and strategies, and showing great respect for the health and well-being of their employees and customers.

The decisions that we county commissioners have had to make in the past year have been arduous. We have had to balance the prosperity of our local economy with the health of our citizens. But I am heartened by the extraordinary efforts of our local business community to remain afloat with such energy and aplomb.

When I ask business owners, "How are you doing?" their greatest concern is always for their employees. One of the great benefits of a community of locally owned businesses is the fact that local income largely stays local, a great benefit in these trying times.

PAMELA WEV
Astoria

Dangerous drug

So, you've had a rough day at work, and you're ready to unwind. How about some exercise? A latte? A stiff drink? What about Facebook?

That's the ticket. It may not be Alice's Restaurant, but you can get anything you want. It's easy. Just turn your computer on. Then turn the switch off to the part of your brain that controls logic, reason and fact. Now you're ready.

Here's a sample of some posts to get you in the mood:

"Get your guns and line them up. Pence

will be first."

"Influenza kills five times more people than COVID."

"If Biden gets elected, you'll never hear about the virus again."

Mark Zuckerberg has created the most dangerous drug on the planet. After all, fentanyl only kills the user.

The antidote only requires turning off the computer, and turning the switch in your brain back on. Most people won't do it. I understand. Reality is a bitter pill to swallow.

TIMOTHY BISH
Astoria

Disappointed

I was disappointed that in the effort to highlight ways to give back to the communities in Clatsop County, that entities in Warrenton are absent from the pages of the newspaper insert.

Warrenton High School Scholarships Inc. is noticeably absent. In existence since 1994, we have provided over \$1 million in scholarships for Warrenton High School graduates. Interestingly enough, Astoria and Seaside scholarship organizations are both mentioned.

Also of note is the miss of Warrenton-Hammond Healthy Kids, dedicated to ensuring children have meals throughout the summer months and on weekends.

A quick search of 990 IRS filings would have provided you a more comprehensive list. I also realize that the insert has limits on space, and perhaps these two important Warrenton programs just landed on the cutting floor.

I look forward to seeing these included if another issue of "Giving Back" is published for 2022.

ANITA J. DECKER
Board member, WHSSI
Warrenton

Our COVID heroes

We call them heroes, the men and women who serve in the military in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the men and women who are serving on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many health care workers will suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome all



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.

of their lives. Over and over they hold the hand of a dying person and whisper words of comfort in their ear as loved ones look on through windows and weep.

Many workers are pushed to the limit of their endurance, but continue to show up for their shift out of dedication and because no one else is available. Often they are left wondering if there was something more they could have done to save a life.

On the front line of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2,900 American health care workers died in 2020. Isn't it time to start talking about more than bonuses for COVID health care workers, and give them what they so clearly deserve?

They should be given full veteran's benefits for life; free health care for themselves and their families, low interest home

loans, reduced cost education benefits, retirement benefits, the whole works.

Considering their sacrifice and the emotional scars many of them will carry for life, I can't think of Americans who deserve these benefits more.

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria

The rest of us

I am interested as to why the Clatsop County commissioners have gotten their COVID-19 vaccinations, while the rest of us have not.

I want to be in the commissioners' tier. Did they crowd in line?

REBA OWEN
Warrenton