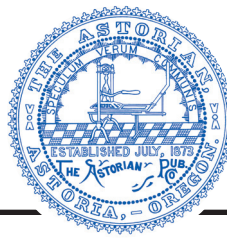


OPINION



the Astorian

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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Charting the grid's future

When Gretchen Bakke was growing up, Bumble Bee Seafoods' cannery was closing, the spotted owl was delivering a possible death knell to the timber industry and Astoria was gritty. The lights also went out all the time.

That spurred the anthropologist to explore what happens when power systems fail and how people react.



JONATHAN WILLIAMS

Bakke's book, "The Grid: The Fraying Wires Between Americans and Our Energy Future," came out in 2016. Microsoft founder Bill Gates listed it as one of his favorites that year. Her

work has seen a resurgence after the extreme power outages that plagued Texas, including interviews with the *The Washington Post* and *National Public Radio*.

Bakke spoke to *The Astorian* from her home in Berlin, Germany, about the fires and ice storms across Oregon, similarities between the power grid and broadband internet access and what can be done to combat climate disasters.

The Astoria High School graduate went on to earn her doctoral degree in cultural anthropology at the University of Chicago and now teaches at Humboldt University in Berlin.

Her research for her book began in Oregon with the Great Coastal Gale of 2007, which rocked much of the North Coast and left the region without power for nearly a week.

"I was always trying to bring Oregon to the fore in part because people at a global, at a national level, people don't pay that much attention to what's happening in Oregon," Bakke said.

She pointed out that the power outages from the ice storms were the most expensive in the state's history. Bakke's mother, who still lives in Astoria, told her a transformer blew outside her house.

Bakke noted the disparities between Texas's storm and Oregon's. In Oregon, people were still posting pictures on Instagram and Facebook of



Katie Frankowicz/The Astorian

Ice caused trees to snap and downed power lines in Astoria during a storm earlier this month.

branches covered with ice even though their power was out, she said. In Texas, people boiled snow for water.

One similarity the states do share, Bakke says, is the number of power outages they experience each year. Texas has the most in the U.S. Oregon comes in second.

Bakke said what made the outages in Texas so catastrophic was the kind of weather the Lone Star State experienced. It wasn't prepared, "... Not just the electrical infrastructure but the insulation in peoples' homes, the tires on peoples' cars, all of these things, was just not prepared for that level of cold," she said.

She said the state is a special case since it's separated from the rest of the U.S. through its own grid and has a difficult time bringing in extra power.

In a review of her book for *The Wall Street Journal*, R. Tyler Priest writes aptly about the unappreciated significance of electricity: "Without electricity, life shuts down. Buildings and streets go dark. Computers and smartphones die. Televisions flicker off. Food perishes in refrigerators. Even money, which is stored, traded and

monitored electronically, becomes inaccessible."

One way to mitigate power outages is through hardening the grid. Upgrading transformers, moving power lines underground, creating power redundancies, trimming trees, which the North Coast has a surplus of, all help. "The biggest cause of power outages in the United States is trees and vines," Bakke said.

About a decade ago, there used to be just one feeder line to coastal communities until a branch fell on that and they had to fix it, Bakke said. When they did, they doubled the line at Clatskanie, creating a redundancy in case one of the lines went down.

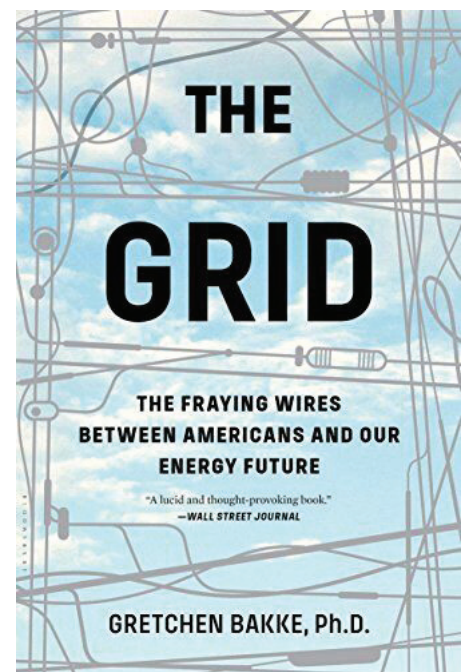
Bakke sees similarities between the power grid and rural broadband issues experienced throughout Clatsop County. Like electricity, broadband sometimes has to be government mandated and funded for areas to get it.

As for how people should prepare for more frequent climate-related disasters, as is predicted by scientists, Bakke thinks it should not all be on the individual.

"... There's something about this



Gretchen Bakke



idea right now, like somehow individual people are responsible for doing what needs to be done to achieve carbon neutrality, and this absolutely can't happen if it's just us like making choices," Bakke said.

She explained that in Europe, the Green Deal aims to reach carbon neutrality across the continent by 2050.

"What I like about that is that it really crosses scale so you could say about your own life, like how can I be carbon neutral, and then your electric company can say, OK about their company, how they can be carbon neutral, so you have at all different scales people tackling the problem as it relates to their particular circumstances or their particular life," Bakke said.

Jonathan Williams is the associate editor of *The Astorian*.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Severance tax

As the Oregon Legislature considers restructuring the tax on harvesting timber, two overarching goals should dominate the discussion: Mitigating climate change and providing jobs for rural Oregonians.

Only a severance tax for harvesting trees on private land would significantly increase the funds that counties now receive from logging on state land, and help accomplish both of these goals.

With an increase in funding for counties coming from a severance tax, the Oregon Department of Forestry will no longer need to sell timber on our state land to the highest bidder. All clearcutting of state land could end leaving the ODF to focus on forest restoration and wildfire mitigation.

ODF's eliminating clearcuts, cleaning up forest debris and restoring forests would help mitigate climate change, while providing abundant employment opportunities for workers in rural communities who are increasingly seeing their jobs eliminated by industry automation.

Funding for ODF could come from measures like eliminating the Oregon Forest Resources Institute, ending subsidies for the Oregon State University College of Forestry, and allowing some selective logging on state land as part of the restoration of forests.

Tax breaks could be offered to timber corporations for doing selective logging instead of clearcutting, brush clearing by hand instead of aerial spraying and science-based forest restoration instead of simply planting trees in rows.

These measures could help accomplish climate change and rural employment goals. Best of all, those corporations would be paying their fair share of taxes again, like they did prior to the 1990s.

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria

Best word

Disgusting is the best word to describe the ugly hatefulness of Erhard Gross' (Feb. 20) letter, "Comparisons," comparing former President Donald Trump to Adolf Hitler, one of history's worst killers of humanity.

It's perplexing *The Astorian* would print such an evil diatribe, written as though the comparison had a factual basis. To print such unfounded hateful diatribe is unworthy of a newspaper that prides itself on its ethics and professionalism.

With half the country and 43% of Clatsop County voters voting for Trump, it's amazing *The Astorian* would intentionally offend so many readers and advertisers by the newspaper's decision to print such unfounded evil vitriol.

DON HASKELL
Astoria

Global access

We all want the coronavirus pandemic to be over, but do we know the most effective, fastest way to do that? We have to increase global access to safe and effective vaccines.

Research from Northeastern University shows that vaccine hoarding by wealthy nations and inequitable vaccine distribution could lead to twice as many COVID-19 deaths worldwide. That's why it's so important that Sen. Ron Wyden, Sen. Jeff Merkley and Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici support global efforts to distribute vaccines, and invest at least \$20 billion in fighting COVID-19 globally, including funding for proven health programs like The Global Fund and Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations.

Regardless of whether you live in Beaverton or Botswana, we're all in this fight together. In order to end this pandemic, the U.S. must help ensure that first respond-

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ers and at-risk populations have priority access to vaccines, regardless of where they live.

Promoting global access to COVID-19 vaccines isn't just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do. If we don't fight the virus everywhere, variants will continue to evolve and spread around the world. It's the only way to end this pandemic as quickly as possible, here in the U.S. and

around the world.

As Congress considers the next COVID-19 emergency relief bill, I encourage Sens. Wyden and Merkley and Rep. Bonamici to support at least \$20 billion in global COVID-19 resources that are essential to reopening the global economy and ending this pandemic everywhere.

MICHAEL KALKOFEN
Beaverton