

OPINION



the Astorian

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OUR VIEW

Tsunami delivered essential lessons

March 11 marks the 10th anniversary of the historic Japanese earthquake and tsunami, which are still sending ripples across the Pacific in the form of heightened awareness and initiatives to improve survivability.

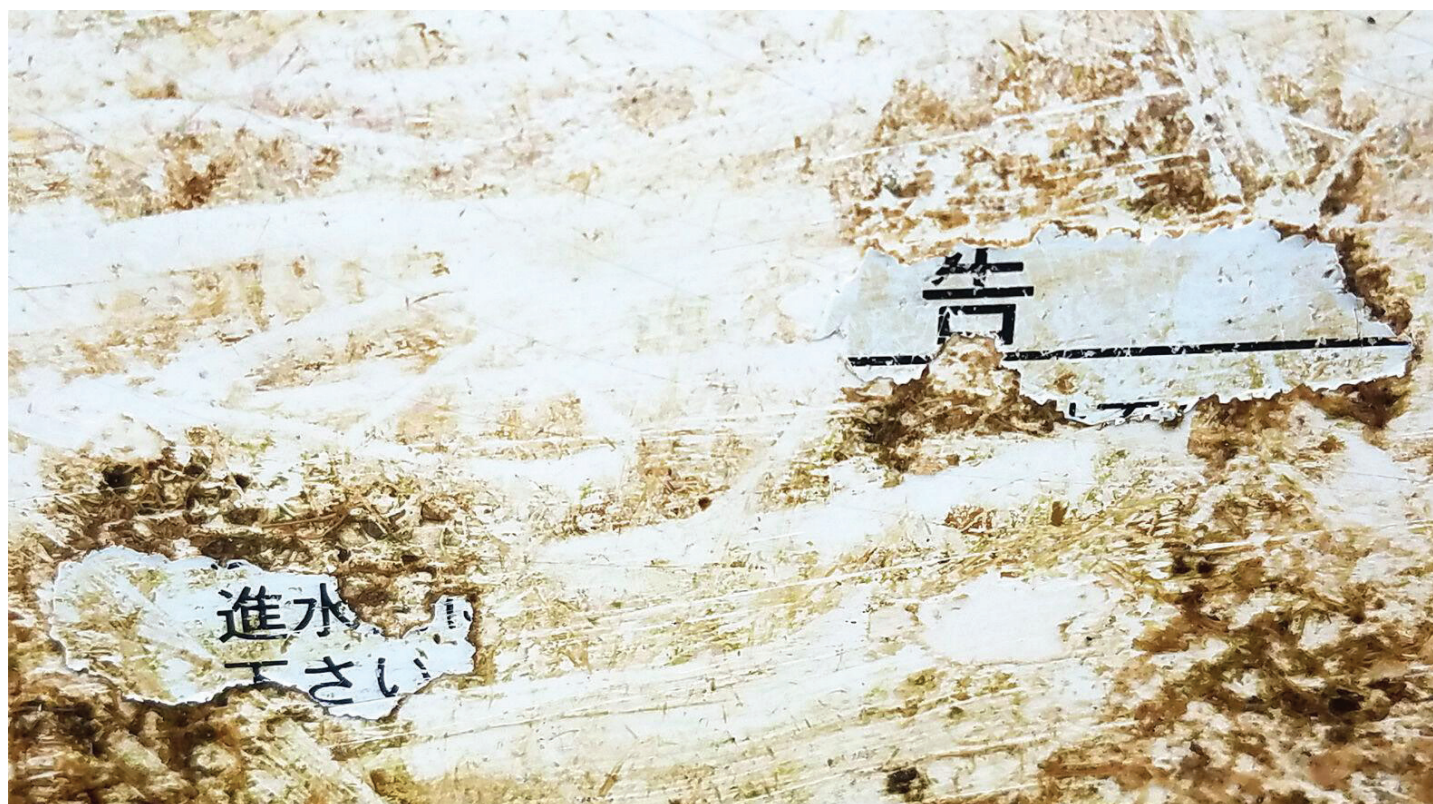
Although an exact toll will never be known, around 22,000 people died. Other consequences — most notably the ongoing environmental disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant — have racked up grotesque monetary and human costs. A rough guess of the 2011 disaster's overall financial total comes to half a trillion dollars.

The thought of a relentless tide-like flood of tall rushing seawater is enough to give anyone the jitters. We must continue transforming these qualms into substantive actions to prepare for the subduction zone earthquakes and resulting tsunamis that inevitably impact all Pacific Rim communities.

On the Pacific Northwest coast, residents in low-lying areas learned of potential approaching danger at 2 a.m. on that awful day. Many evacuated to higher ground. It was scary and inconvenient, but the high water dissipated on its way across the ocean — news people watching from near the shoreline barely noticed a thing.

The intervening decade has seen substantial gains. The Washington state coast now has a fully implemented siren system to warn of tsunamis spawned by far-off quakes. Seaside succeeded in winning voter support for a tsunami-safe school campus, part of Oregon's energetic efforts to safeguard children and vital facilities. Aided by federal funds, the Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe built a vertical evacuation tower. Improved modeling is helping residents understand the risks and plan paths of escape.

In other ways, much remains to be done. With only minor modifications, what we said 10 years ago



A 10-meter fiberglass boat that washed ashore in Long Beach was marked with Japanese characters. The words on the lower left mean 'launch a ship' and 'please.' The character on the upper right is probably part of the word 'caution.'

Rob Waltemate

still applies today:

- The horrific 9.0 earthquake that hit Japan is close to exactly what can happen in the Pacific Northwest, minus the nuclear reactor failure. Like theirs, ours will be a subduction zone quake, the most powerful seismic events on the planet. A series of tsunamis will begin sweeping ashore within half an hour. There will be death and destruction.

- We must expand our thinking about where and how to care for thousands of potential evacuees above the inundation zone. Medical supplies, food, water, blankets and other necessities should be pre-staged in sufficient quantities to last two weeks.

- Efforts to move schools, hospitals and other public facilities out of the danger zone must continue. Unlike in Oregon, they have yet to even seriously begin in Washington state. Additional vertical evacuation towers could save many lives.

- Preparation and practice are

keys to limiting losses. One of the most meaningful headlines written about the 2011 disaster was this: "Japan's strict building codes saved lives." Having survived many such events, Japan has been far better than the U.S. about getting ready. We will be fools not to copy them. Washington and Oregon both should be far more serious about seismic retrofits in older buildings. Imagine, for a moment, what a 9.0 quake would do to the old masonry structures in downtown Astoria, Raymond and Aberdeen. Though it probably is impossible to make them safe, it is at least worth considering doing things like hardening some rooms or passageways that could save lives within the rubble.

- Possibly the most useful lessons are personal ones. We all need to think about exactly what we need to do to make sure our families survive. This should start with serious discussions about how to get out of houses, where to meet afterward, and what paths to take to high

ground. We all should have ample canned food and bottled water on hand. Keeping basic bundles of supplies in our car trunks is a good idea, possibly including a few days of vital prescriptions, sleeping bags and water.

- Designate a contact person outside the coastal zone with whom family members can leave messages. In these days of ample free electronic storage in the internet cloud, store copies of vital documents and irreplaceable family photos there, where they cannot be destroyed.

- Finally: If we experience a strong, sustained earthquake, immediately get to high ground or as far as possible away from the shoreline to give the tsunami time to slow — crushing injuries sometimes pose a bigger risk than drowning. Stay there until authorities say it is safe to return home. Do not wait for an official warning. You will have minutes to save yourself and your family.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Laughable

Laughable is the best word to describe the name-calling in Don Haskell's letter, "Best word" (Feb. 27), complaining about Erhard Gross' letter, "Comparisons" (Feb. 20), comparing former President Donald Trump to Adolf Hitler.

Actually, Haskell devoted two of his three paragraphs to excoriating The Astorian for printing the letter, which he considered "unfounded." He considered it "amazing" that The Astorian would "intentionally offend" the many people who voted for Trump.

So now that Joe Biden is president, should The Astorian reject letters that are critical of him?

Haskell cannot bring himself to consider the many specific facts, names and incidents in Gross' letter. There are no discussion points, just adjectives: disgusting, evil, hateful, evil (again), vitriol (if you'll excuse a noun).

This was in pointed contrast to Gross' letter, which read very mildly, without flailing adjectives, and reached nuanced conclusions. In fact, his final sentence states that Trump never got as bad as Hitler.

Haskell's use of emotional adjectives and his tactic of simply stating his conclusions, and expecting people to believe them, remind me of his fallen hero.

STEWART BELL
Astoria

Strong reactions

Letters to the editor can provoke strong reactions from readers. I recently received such a letter in the mail. Its writer advised me: "Please never answer the call to be a juror ... and 'please get a clue, or don't submit garbage for print. It makes you look stupid.'"

The letter, not without several grammat-

ical flaws, was typed, the envelope handwritten, but without a return address. Since the writer did not disclose his or her name, but merely signed with "an informed person," I concluded that the writer was less than sure of himself in a county that voted decisively against his man.

My letter of Feb. 20 triggered a visceral condemnation from a former member of the legal profession. This longtime champion of the disgraced former president minced no words in castigating me, but, at least, the "gentleman" had the courtesy of signing his opinion.

ERHARD GROSS
Astoria

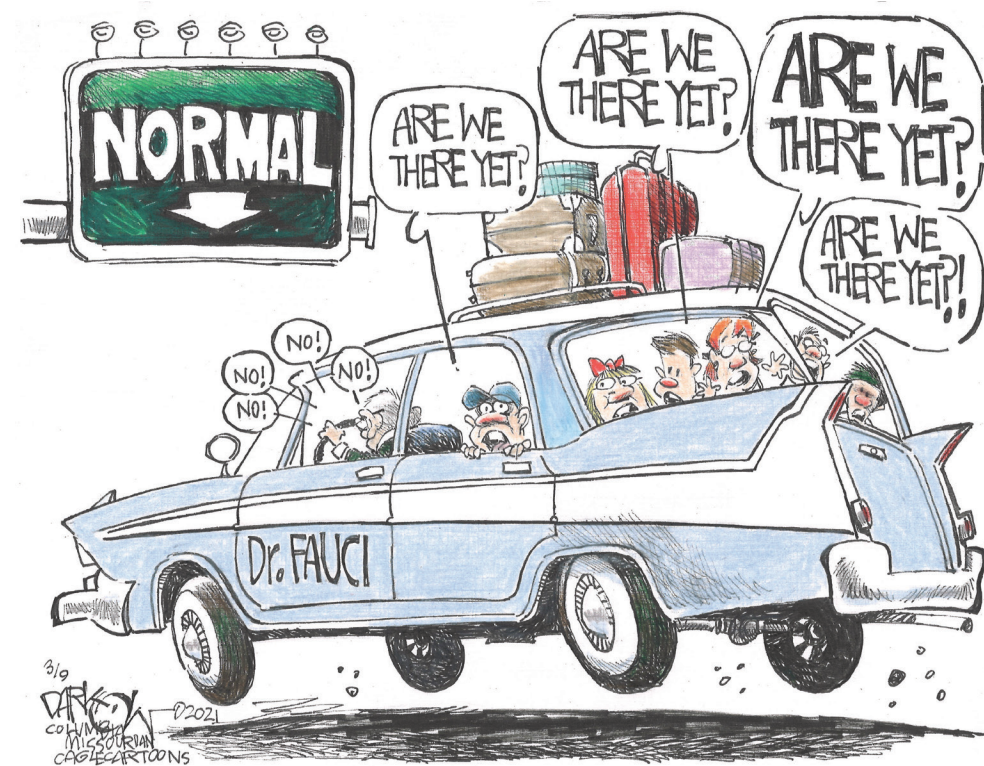
Embracing the chaos

The New York Times reported recently on the death of Vernon Jordan, who fought vigorously for civil rights for at least five decades. That obituary prompted me to look at a number of obituaries reported in the national press within the past couple of years.

What I found can be boiled down to the well-worn phrase "the more things change, the more they stay the same." In particular, regardless of the year, as a nation we are continuing to fight the same battles relentlessly, inexorably, repeatedly, with not a lot of progress to show for it.

For example, current headlines show that the Supreme Court is willing, more than 150 years after the Civil War, to consider adding restrictions to voting rights. It appears that polarization among Americans is built into our form of democracy. Some of this encoded polarization is due to the tension between states' rights and the federal government's role.

Our two-party system is supposed to capture the essence of the polarization, but that is clearly not happening. Intraparty differences are too numerous and complex to be navigated and resolved by reasonable



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.

dialogue and compromise.

For many years, I could not understand why the Israeli parliament was so fractious, and the government so dependent for its functioning on coalitions of opposing factions. Now I think I understand completely.

The American two-party system simply no longer works as planned. Acknowledging and embracing the chaos of our nominal polarization might be what saves our democracy.

BARRY PLOTKIN
Astoria