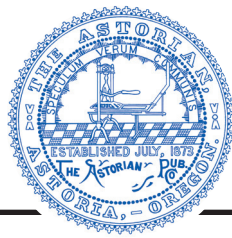


OPINION



the Astorian

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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Does Portland love itself?

I have a box of index cards for a book that I never wrote. The working title was “Goodbye, Oregon: The Passing of a Place.” I gathered research material in the 1980s. The book’s premise was that various geographical and cultural landmarks of the state, that I had known since the 1950s, were being transformed.



STEVE FORRESTER

Today, I am wondering whether that thesis should be applied to what is happening to Portland.

Having grown up in Oregon, I have known many Portlands. The city I knew in my adolescence was a middle-class town with block after downtown block of smaller, family-owned shops and restaurants. I subsequently called Portland my home from 1968 to 1978. That Portland was a charming place that fine dining had not discovered.

I believe it was the economist Jane Jacobs who observed that, “Great cities love themselves.” It seemed to me that Jacobs’ axiom fit Portland in those days. It was not yet the foodie paradise it would become. The Trail Blazers won their NBA championship. The town’s rich architecture was something to study and be proud of.

These days, I wonder about Portland’s affection for itself. During an interview I did with a Portland-based magazine editor in mid-January, I recited Jacobs’ observation and asked: “Does Portland love itself these days?” She answered: “No.”

Following the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, Portland’s nightly Black Lives Matter demonstrations — as the nights wore on — were taken over by rioters. Among their contradictory desecrations was removing the Afro-American Heritage Bicentennial Commemorative Quilt from its display in the Oregon Historical Society. Created by a group of 15 Portland African American women, the quilt depicted key moments and persons from the African American history of America. Among the quilters was Gladys



Gillian Flaccus/AP Photo

Masked protesters by an occupied home speak with a neighborhood resident opposed to their demonstration in Portland in December.

PORTLAND'S RIOTS BECAME MUCH MORE THAN A STAPLE OF VIOLENT FOOTAGE FOR TELEVISION NEWS. THEY HAVE TAKEN A TOLL.

McCoy, the first person of color elected to public office in Oregon.

Portland’s riots became much more than a staple of violent footage for television news. They have taken a toll.

Portland’s preeminent journalist, Nigel Jaquiss, of Willamette Week, took note in January. His story, headlined “A key indicator of real estate investors’ interest in Portland shows a precipitous decline,” noted that Portland had plummeted from near the top of a ranking of 80 cities to near the bottom. He wrote: “That plunge in confidence appears to stem from factors that include widely broadcast images of protests and nearby wildfires. It may be exacerbated by the documented flight of businesses from the city’s core and factors such as the cost of property insurance rising 30% to 50% amid repeated

vandalism.”

Later that week, Forbes magazine took notice. In a story headlined “Death of a city: The Portland story?” the magazine asked: “How long does it take for a city to die?”

In February, Jaquiss reported on the observations of real estate professionals in and around Portland. In a bit of hyperbole, one of those professionals had written a paper raising the specter of Pompeii. Summoning a different urban decline, Jaquiss’ piece was headlined: “Forget Pompeii. Is Portland the next Detroit?”

In mid-December, my wife and I visited downtown Portland on our way to see her college classmate in Multnomah Village. I dropped into Rich’s Cigar Store, whose Alder Street façade was covered in plywood. It was dispiriting to see so

many buildings wearing these anonymous wooden storefronts. On-street parking was abundant.

For anyone who has known Portland’s exuberance for itself and its eccentric lifestyle (think “Portlandia”), this is a major turn in the road. When I have spoken with Portland friends, they cite the weak mayor, Ted Wheeler, as one reason for the city’s being like a sailing ship adrift on choppy seas, with its masts and rudder disabled. One Portland friend suggests that Wheeler will be recalled from office in the spring. And succeeded by whom?

Cities are always somewhere in the cycle of deterioration, atrophy and restoration. Astoria’s rebirth over the past three decades has been remarkable.

Where is Portland’s momentum going? How will the story end? Certainly political leadership will determine the outcome. So will the affection of its citizens. Presently, it seems like Portland is a hard place to love.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of The Astorian, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mental heartburn

The March 9 guest column from Dick Hughes on unexpected revenue causes me mental heartburn, when I see comments like a tax “kicker” rebate is likely because of the unexpected revenue received in 2020, while at the same time Gov. Kate Brown wants more federal stimulus money, even though she has not spent all that has been received.

I listen to my local city leaders, who tell me that the expenses they have incurred from the COVID-19 pandemic far exceed revenue received from federal or state sources. Either the state is sitting on money that should have been sent to counties and cities in Oregon, or local governments are not telling the public the full story.

How anyone can believe anything coming from government is a mystery to me. I believe that no matter how much money the state taxes its citizens, it will never be enough.

I understand that the public spin is that new taxes are only aimed at very high-income people. My bet is the advisers to Phil Knight will outsmart the “tax them till they drop” crowd all day long.

Experience tells me more than 50% of Oregon taxpayers will end up paying more taxes in the foreseeable future, no matter how they spin it.

There seems to be a new belief in America that the government can always print more money anytime they need it. I object to the out-of-control spending underway at this time. I also object to most political incumbents.

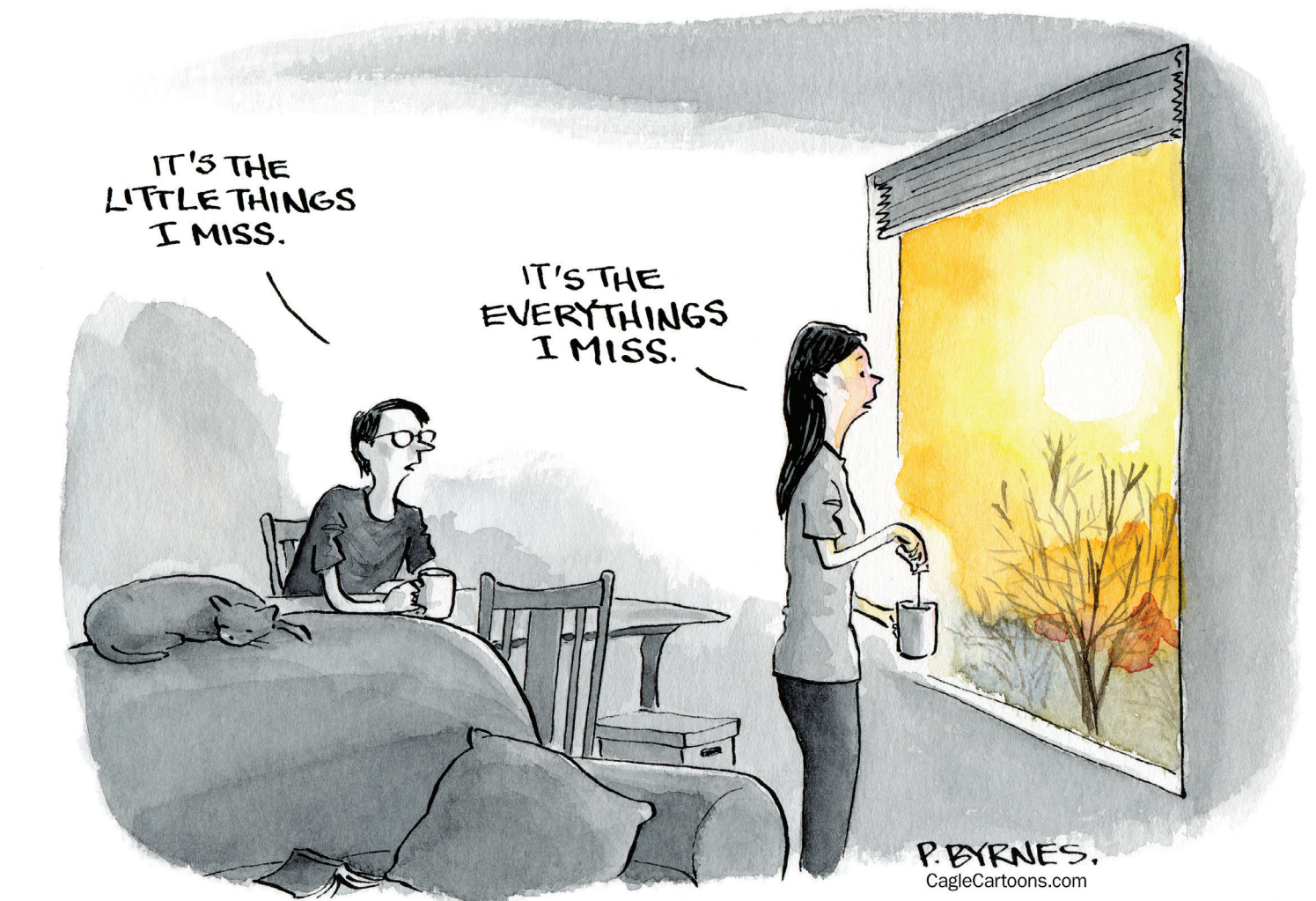
SCOTT WIDDICOMBE
Warrenton

Class warfare

In reply to Jenny Johnson’s letter of March 9, I would ask that readers substitute the word “plantation” for the word “forest” and “logging” for the word “forestry” wherever these words appear.

All her greenwashing will never make the tax-free harvesting of private timberlands any more palatable than the factual record of how county revenues and Oregon Department of Forestry funding plummeted after the 1990 abolition of the state’s harvest and severance taxes.

Her statement that reinstating these taxes on harvests will somehow cost jobs and businesses in rural Oregon is unsupported. It is not as if timber harvests are



P. BYRNES.
CagleCartoons.com

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.

arranged as a public service.

Wherever trees are a crop, there will be harvests. It will be profitable, just as it was in the beginning, and as it was from the 1950s to the late 1980s. And, it is a living fact that the 1990s abatement of harvest and severance taxes has made short rotation harvests obscenely profitable.

Labor costs have been rendered insignificant. Mechanization and related fuel and machinery costs are outlandish, but

these expenses are now assumed by the logger.

It is past time to reinstate harvest and severance taxes on the owners as sources of public revenue, to ensure that working people of all persuasions and economic sectors aren’t holding the bag to fund every needed public expenditure.

Absentee owners and their proxies need to pay their share. To demand less perpetuates a disgrace, and solidifies Clat-

sop County’s role as a backwoods resource colony.

GARY DURHEIM
Seaside

Think about it

What if I were to get a building material package, and wanted to pay cash for it, but no invoice came?

And then they asked me for \$15,000, and I expected \$12,000, after I asked and asked for them to give me a receipt and would be the materials. Do you think they would be right there to check it out? You bet, I know them, and they are honest people.

What if they balked and wouldn’t check? What would you think? If I worked for that company, I would work that out or quit my job. They made me look dishonest, too.

Let’s get our voting right: Legal people, same day, and on paper.

CHUCK BERGERSON
Warrenton