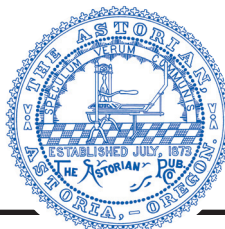


# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## GUEST COLUMN

# An Oregon Republican looks to expand Idaho

Mark Simmons, a Republican former speaker of the Oregon House, was set to testify last week at the Idaho Legislature in favor of letting eastern and southern Oregon counties become part of Idaho.

But a not-so-funny thing happened in the Idaho Capitol. Nine new COVID-19 infections were reported there, and the Idaho Legislature abruptly decided to shut down for a few weeks.



DICK HUGHES

Simmons, of Elgin in Union County, presided during the 2001-2002 legislative cycle. He was among a string of Republican House speakers. Now we have the longest-serving presiding officers in Oregon

history, both Democrats, in state Senate President Peter Courtney, of Salem, and House Speaker Tina Kotek, of Portland.

Simmons' testimony at the Idaho Legislature has been rescheduled for April 12. Mike McCarter, the president of the newly formed Citizens for Greater Idaho and head of Move Oregon's Border, said testimony would show that "moving the Oregon/Idaho border farther from Boise will protect Idahoans from the ill effects of Oregon's new drug law," an apparent reference to last fall's passage of Measure 110.

As for the pandemic, the Oregon House also partially shut down, canceling all floor sessions until this week because people might have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 during the March 15 or March 16 floor sessions. That person, presumably a House member or one of the few staff in the House chamber, was not publicly identified.

Oregon, which has required legislators to wear protective face masks on the House and Senate floors, had been among the few states without any coronavirus infections among lawmakers.

Unlike Oregon, Idaho neither closed its Capitol to the public nor required face masks. Lawmakers were not allowed to participate remotely, but public seating was limited and the public was allowed to testify remotely.

Idaho politics are a reverse of Oregon's, which is why some Oregonians embrace the notion of shifting the state border. Idaho Republicans are the ones who hold supermajorities in their Legislature. They outnumber Democrats 28 to 7 in the Idaho Senate and 58 to 12 in the House. The split is so wide that the House and Senate committees that will



Some Oregon counties are looking to the east.

hear Simmons' testimony have a combined 20 Rs and five Ds.

Backers of an expanded Idaho suggest, "Areas that vote like Idaho does, and are economically healthy enough to be welcomed by Idaho, are eastern, southern and most of central Oregon, southeastern Washington and northeastern California."

It's a long shot idea that would require congressional action, but five Oregon counties — Baker, Grant, Lake, Malheur and Sherman — have related measures on their May ballots. Petition drives also are under way in Curry, Josephine, Jackson, Klamath, Harney, Morrow and Umatilla counties. Among the arguments being presented for the border change are that "voters will appreciate Idaho's overall lower taxes and red-state values on hot-button topics."

One such topic is gun control, a defining issue of urban and rural America.

**Gun control in Oregon:** "Col-leagues, this is the urban-rural divide," Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, said Thursday as the Oregon Senate debated Senate Bill 554. It would allow the state and local governments to ban anyone,

including holders of concealed weapons permits, from bringing firearms onto public property.

"You wonder why many counties in Eastern Oregon want a divorce from Multnomah County? This is why," Knopp said.

The bill passed 16 to 7 on a near party-line vote, with Sen. Betsy Johnson, of Scappoose, the only Democrat who voted "no." Five senators declared potential conflicts of interest because they have a concealed handgun license: Senate Republican Leader Fred Girod, of Lyons; Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale; Knopp; Johnson; and James Manning Jr., D-Eugene.

Much of the debate came down to how comfortable people were in being around anyone carrying a concealed firearm.

A statewide survey this month by DHM Research found that 59% of respondents either strongly or somewhat support the policy behind SB 554.

Responses were divided along geographic and partisan lines. Support in the Portland metro area was 69%; Willamette Valley, 56%; and the rest of the state, 49%. Among Democrats, support was 80%, compared with 38% of

Republicans and 54% of other voters.

State law bans most Oregonians from possessing firearms in public buildings unless they have a concealed handgun license, and Knopp described SB 554 as "a bill in search of a problem."

Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, has long been trying to get the policy through the Legislature. She said the identities of Oregon's nearly 300,000 concealed handgun license holders are confidential, so it's unknown whether any had committed violent crimes in public buildings.

**More on Idaho and gun control:**

Back when states appreciated mavericks, Idaho produced the liberal U.S. Sen. Frank Church, who served during from 1957 to 1981 before losing reelection. On national issues, Church frequently was out of step with his conservative constituents. But on gun control, he staunchly opposed any attempt to hinder Idahoans' right to bear arms.

By the way, Church was the last Democrat from Idaho to serve in the U.S. Senate, just as Vic Atiyeh was the last Republican governor of Oregon, serving from 1979 to 1987.

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Interested

Reading a Chinook Observer story written by Jeff Clemens (The Astorian, March 23), I was interested in the headline "... changes on treacherous portion of Highway 101." I was curious to see what changes could be made. A study found that a particular curve had been the scene of repeated life-threatening crashes.

The Washington State Department of Transportation decided to install supplemental signs called chevrons, yellow-colored with 40 mph on them, were posted with reflectors at 80-foot spacing throughout the whole curve. Time will tell if this added advisory will caution drivers to slow down.

This brought to mind a similar situation drivers here in Clatsop County are faced with on the same highway farther south in Warrenton. It's the S-turn (chicane) between the Cullaby Lake entrance and Reed and Hertig packing. There have been two fatalities in a short period of time, plus a fiery rollover a few years ago.

So I would like to see the same proactive additions made in this area, such as Washington has done.

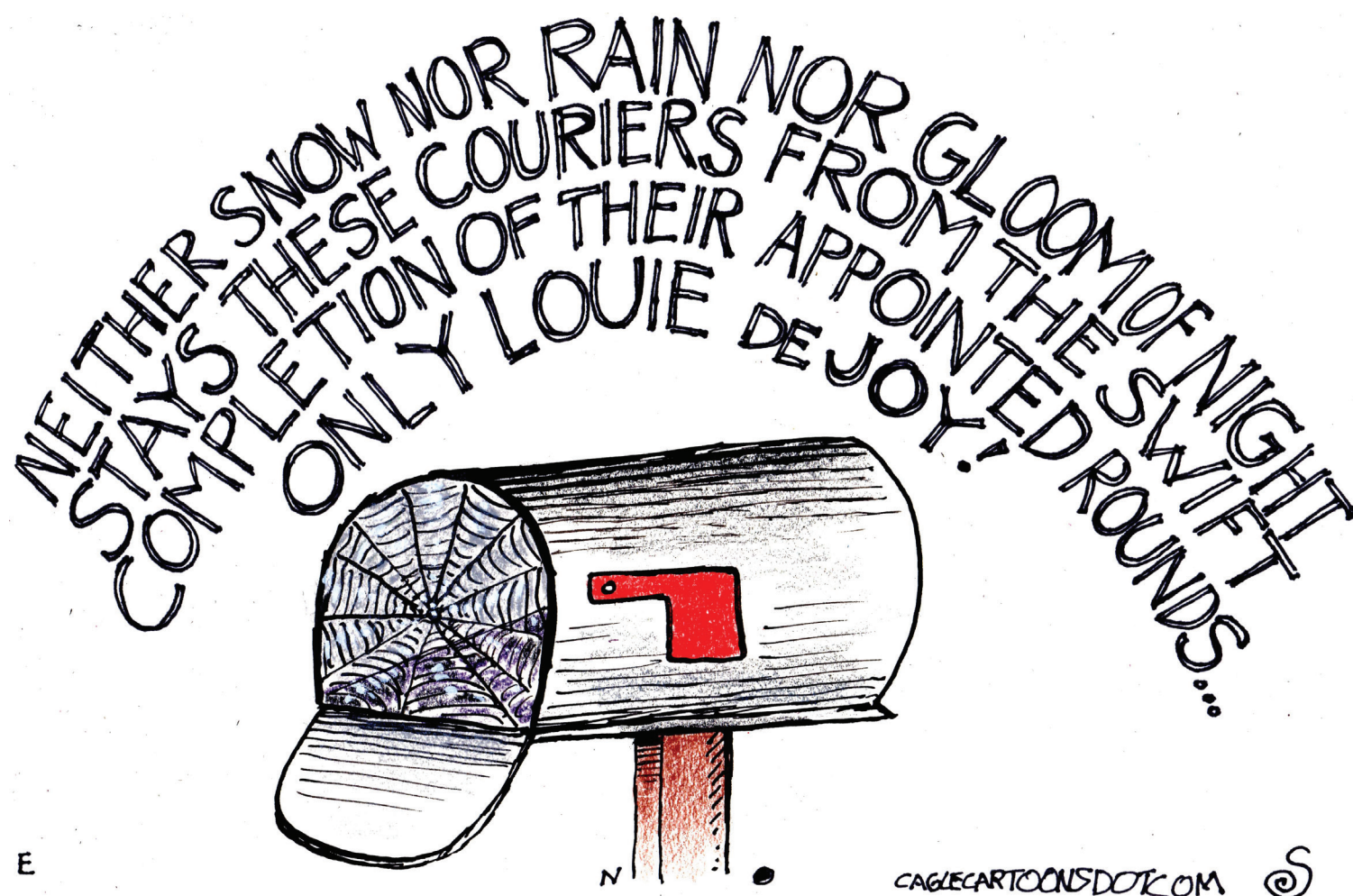
JOHN MEINERS  
Astoria

### Accessibility

Trails End Art Association is grateful to the Clatsop County Cultural Coalition and the Oregon Cultural Trust for help purchasing our two new 72-inch by 30-inch height adjustable Americans with Disabilities Act work tables.

Our goal for 2020-2021 was to improve on our accessibility for members and students in Clatsop County who desire hands-on art experiences. We are now able to meet some of the disability member needs who presently attend groups, and look forward to our in-person workshops and classes in the near future.

You can support projects like this by



donations to the Oregon Cultural Trust at culturaltrust.org. The donations become a direct tax credit on your Oregon income tax for the year that you donate.

KITTY PAINO  
Astoria

### Judgmental

The Terminator, in "Terminator 2: Judgment Day," must have been referring to spring breakers — and probably COVID-19 and vaccine deniers — when he said of humanity: "... it is in your nature to destroy yourselves."

DONNA LEE ROLLINS  
Astoria

## 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.