

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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Founded in 1873

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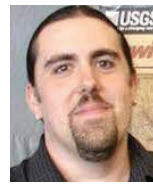
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## GUEST COLUMN

# We cannot afford to wait

If social justice matters to our congressional delegation, which we believe it does, then it is long past time to restore federal recognition to the Chinook Indian Nation. The responsibility and power to do so is entirely within the capability of Congress, and every day of delay or inaction is another day of justice denied, another day of injustice perpetuated.



**TONY JOHNSON**



**BRIAN BAIRD**

After decades of work and mountains of historical and legal evidence, the Chinook Nation was formally recognized at the end of the Clinton administration. Finally, it seemed, a centuries-old attempt at genocide had been reversed. But then, with much less analysis and biased, factually inaccurate arguments, the Bush administration unilaterally rescinded the recognition.

Doing so essentially validated ethnic cleansing by declaring, falsely, that one of the most iconic and historically significant peoples of our region, the tribe that greeted and saved the Lewis and Clark expedition, had been exterminated and would no longer be deemed to exist.

The effect has been devastating to the Chinook. Many of the Chinook people of Washington state and Oregon have died unnecessarily due to inadequate health care, been denied educational and housing opportunities and been unable to benefit from federal and state resources.

The pain and damage are crushingly acute now during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent federal stimulus legislation allocated an unprecedented and unlikely-to-be-repeated \$43 billion to improve health care, education, provide broadband and support other vital needs across some of the country's poorest tribal communities. Tribes nationwide also are planning for years of future work in anticipation of an upcoming infrastructure bill.

But the Chinook have not received one penny of that support because it only flows to recognized tribes. To add insult to injury, if recognition is not restored soon, Chinook families also stand to lose even the land allotments once specifically set aside in their name by the government.

The Chinook Indian Nation is made up of the five westernmost Chinookan-speaking tribes at the mouth of the Columbia River. Our nearly 70-year-old constitution identifies our five constituent tribes — the Clatsop and Cathlamet (Kathlamet) of present-day Oregon



Ashley Nerbovig/Chinook Observer

Chinook Indian Nation Chairman Tony Johnson leads a march to the U.S. District Court in Tacoma last year.

*THE CHINOOK PEOPLE ARE LOSING THEIR LIVES, THEIR OPPORTUNITIES, THEIR PROPERTY AND THEIR RIGHTS. WE CANNOT AFFORD TO WAIT ANY LONGER, AND WE LOOK TO YOU TO RIGHT THIS WRONG.*

and the Lower Chinook, Wahkiakum (Waukikum) and Willapa (Weelappa) of what is now Washington state.

It is not only the Chinook Nation that suffers. Pacific County, where much of the Chinook tribal homeland is located, has the highest unemployment levels in the state, and average family incomes are far below the state and national average. Providing needed federal resources to the Chinook would help strengthen the local economy for all residents, sustain local hospitals, support regional infrastructure, bring additional housing and jobs and enhance the region's natural resources.

It must be emphasized that no one gets hurt by Chinook recognition, and support for the Chinook is broad and deep. Local and regional governments have endorsed recognition, as have many other tribes in Washington and Oregon.

Prominent individuals such as filmmaker Ken Burns, descendants of the Lewis and Clark expedition and tens of thousands of Americans have written letters and signed petitions supporting the Chinook.

U.S. Sen. Patty Murray and U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell spoke favorably when the Chinook were first recognized, as did many other current and former members of our congressional delegation. Now, with new leadership in the White House and Congress, with the first ever Native American secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior and with a realization that complacency in the face of social injustice is complicity, our delegation must act and lead.

It is all too easy to look the other way, pass the buck, leave it up to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, or insist that anyone who had opposed recognition before

would have to consent now. Those responses are all too familiar. But the cause of civil rights and social justice would have made no progress if Congress failed to act or insisted that the oppressors had to give permission for the oppressed to gain their rights.

The fact is, Congress has not granted the Bureau of Indian Affairs authority to reverse its prior reversals and restore recognition, but the Congress itself unquestionably has the authority to recognize tribes. That is exactly how Republicans and Democrats from Montana worked together in 2019 to restore recognition for the Little Shell.

We ask our delegation to do the same for the Chinook people. Please, join together now and commit to enacting full restoration and recognition for the Chinook Indian Nation before the end of this session of Congress.

The Chinook people are losing their lives, their opportunities, their property and their rights. We cannot afford to wait any longer, and we look to you to right this wrong.

Tony Johnson is chairman of the Chinook Indian Nation. Brian Baird was the Democratic representative from Washington's 3rd Congressional District for six terms. He now resides in Edmonds.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Race against time

The COVID-19 outbreak in India is a humanitarian crisis with global implications. It's also a powerful reminder that we won't end this pandemic anywhere, unless we end it everywhere.

The world is facing a vaccine access crisis. While wealthy countries continue ramping up vaccinations, only about 0.4% of COVID-19 vaccines globally have been administered to people in low-income countries. The U.S. alone has secured well over 550 million excess COVID-19 vaccine doses.

We are in a race against time. These vaccines are desperately needed around the world, and will save lives and stem further mutations that could result in a resurgence of the virus in the U.S., and around the world.

Gov. Kate Brown, U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden should call on the Biden administration to do more to share America's vaccine stockpile equitably with countries in need.

Regardless of whether you live in Astoria or Algiers, we're all in this fight together. Sharing excess vaccines isn't just the humane thing to do, it's the smart thing to do to reduce the spread of variants, reopen our global economy and help to end this pandemic faster, everywhere.

ELIZABETH DIX  
Beaverton

### Strengthen democracy

On behalf of Indivisible North Coast Oregon, I'm writing to thank U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley for their leadership regarding the For the People Act. Merkley sponsored the bill, and Wyden is a co-sponsor.

As a grassroots group dedicated to defending democracy and promoting civic engagement, we know how essential this legislation is. It goes without saying that Congress must protect voters, limit gerrymandering and guarantee fair and transparent elections throughout the U.S., as this bill would do.

The For the People Act will prevent more Republican-sponsored anti-democracy voter suppression bills in states around the country. The GOP's work to undermine democracy weakens our country, and creates cynicism and fear where there should be cooperation and confidence.

Powerful groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, oppose the For the People Act, so everyone who wants a healthy democracy must tell their U.S. senators to vote for this legislation.

We urge both senators to continue to work to pass this bill. We urge Oregonians to contact our senators in support; then they can show their reluctant GOP colleagues that the public wants them to strengthen our democracy. Their contact information is at [incoregon.org](http://incoregon.org)

Laurie Caplan  
Indivisible North Coast Oregon  
Astoria

### Intense burden

To the Cannon Beach City Council: I am writing to oppose the proposed food and beverage tax on restaurants and eateries.

Please consider the intense burden restaurants are already weathering, with the effects of the pandemic fast and deep. Were it not for federal assistance, most restaurant employees would be in dire financial situations, especially those rely-



ing on tips.

We are among the fortunate few able to expand our outdoor seating, yet not enough to compensate for operating at 25% to 50% capacity. Revenue loss has been extraordinary, and such a tax makes our slow recovery even harder.

Software updates, additional processing and labor for staff training are just a few costs associated with an added tax. More detrimental are the incalculable costs — challenges from customers in a state where value added taxes are not the norm, slower table turnaround, lower employee tips and revenue lost to other areas free of such a tax.

Customer goodwill to the area will suffer substantially and restaurants will bear the loss. Please consider any alternative to this tax. Our restaurant has been a destination for locals and travelers alike for 77 years, and we do not take that support for granted.

I remain respectfully grateful for the quick decisions and flexibility of the city in allowing us to remain open safely during these challenging months, and certainly support your efforts in service of our community — but not with this tax.

PAUL NOFIELD  
Owner, Driftwood Restaurant and Lounge  
Cannon Beach